

I'M MIKE HAMMER

I'm a—well, let's say a private eye, working here in N.Y.—and my friend Chester Wheeler is in his hotel room, dead, with my gun in his hand. It looked like a straightforward suicide case to everyone but me. And when I found out the kind of women Chester had been going around with; and when some thugs tried to persuade me to lose interest in the case, I knew I was on to something corrupt. I decided I'd better get to the bottom of it—before anyone else found himself booked for eternity in six feet of earth.

MY GUN IS QUICK
ONE LONELY NIGHT
THE BIG KILL
THE LONG WAIT
I, THE JURY
KISS ME, DEADLY
THE DEEP
ME, HOOD!
THE GIRL HUNTERS
THE FLIER
RETURN OF THE HOOD
KILLER MINE
THE SNAKE
DAY OF THE GUNS
BLOODY SUNRISE
THE DEATH DEALERS

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MICKEY SPILLANE

VENGEANCE IS MINE

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All characters and events depicted herein
are purely fictional. Any resemblance to
persons living or dead, or actual events
is coincidental.

—M. S.

To
JOE AND GEORGE
WHO ARE ALWAYS READY FOR
A NEW ADVENTURE
And to
WARD . . .
WHO USED TO BE

CHAPTER ONE

THE guy was dead as hell. He lay on the floor in his pyjamas with his brains scattered all over the rug and my gun was in his hand. I kept rubbing my face to wipe out the fuzz that clouded my mind, but the cops wouldn't let me. One would pull my hand away and shout a question at me that made my head ache even worse and another would slap me with a wet rag until I felt like I had been split wide open.

I said, 'Goddamn it, stop!'

Then one of them laughed and shoved me back on the bed.

I couldn't think, I couldn't remember, I was wound up like a spring and ready to bust. All I could see was the dead guy in the middle of the room and my gun. My gun! Somebody grabbed at my arm and hauled me upright and the questions started again. That was as much as I could take. I gave a hell of a kick and a fat face in a fedora pulled back out of focus and started to groan, all doubled up. Maybe I laughed, I don't know. Something made a coarse, cackling sound.

Somebody said, 'I'll fix the bastard for that!' but before he could the door opened and the feet coming in stopped all the chatter except the groan and I knew Pat was there.

My mouth opened, and my voice said, 'Good old Pat, always to the rescue.'

He didn't sound friendly. 'Of all the damn fool times to be drunk. Did anyone touch this man?' Nobody answered. The fat face in the fedora was slumped in a chair and groaned again.

'He kicked me. The son of a bitch kicked me . . . right here.'

Another voice said, 'That's right, Captain. Marshall was questioning him and he kicked him.'

Pat grunted an answer and bent over me. 'All right, Mike, get up. Come on, get up.' His hand wrapped around my wrist and levered me into a right angle on the edge of the bed.

'Cripes, I feel lousy,' I said.

'I'm afraid you're going to feel a lot worse.' He took the wet rag and handed it to me. 'Wipe your face off. You look like hell.'

I held the cloth in my hands and dropped my face into it. Some of the clouds broke up and disappeared. When the shaking stopped I was propped up and half pushed into the

bathroom. The shower was a cold lash that bit into my skin, but it woke me up to the fact that I was a human being and not a soul floating in space. I took all I could stand and turned off the faucet myself, then stepped out. By that time Pat had a container of steaming coffee in my hand and practically poured it down my throat. I tried to grin at him over the top of it, only there was no humour in the grin and there was less in Pat's tone.

His words came out in a disgusted snarl. 'Cut the funny stuff, Mike. This time you're in a jam and a good one. What the devil has gotten into you? Good God, do you have to go off the deep end every time you get tangled with a dame?'

'She wasn't a dame, Pat.'

'O.K., she was a good kid and I know it. There's still no excuse.'

I said something nasty. My tongue was still thick and uncoordinated, but he knew what I meant. I said it twice until he was sure to get it.

'Shut up,' he told me. 'You're not the first one it's happened to. What do I have to do—smack you in the teeth with the fact that you were in love with a woman that got killed until you finally catch on that there's nothing more you can do about it?'

'Nuts! There were two of them.'

'All right, forget it. Do you know what's outside there?'

'Sure, a corpse.'

'That's right, a corpse. Just like that. Both of you in the same hotel room and one of you dead. He's got your gun and you're drunk. What about it?'

'I shot him. I was walking in my sleep and I shot him.'

This time Pat said the nasty word. 'Quit lousing me up, Mike. I want to find out what happened.'

I waved my thumb towards the other room. 'Where'd the goons come from?'

'They're policemen. Mike. They're policemen just like me and they want to know the same things I do. At three o'clock the couple next door heard what they thought was a shot. They attributed it to a street noise until the maid walked in this morning and saw the guy on the floor and passed out in the doorway. Somebody called the cops and there it was. Now, what happened?'

'I'll be damned if I know,' I said.

'You'll be damned if you don't.'

I looked at Pat, my pal, my buddy. Captain Patrick Chambers, Homicide Department of New York's finest. He didn't look happy.

I felt a little sick and got the lid of the bowl up just in time.

Pat let me finish and wash my mouth out with water, then he handed me my clothes. 'Get dressed.' His mouth crinkled up and he shook his head disgustedly.

My hands were shaking so hard I started to curse the buttons on my shirt. I got my tie under my collar, but I couldn't knot it, so I let the damn thing hang. Pat held my coat and I slid into it, thankful that a guy can still be a friend even when he's teed off at you.

Fat Face in the fedora was still in the chair when I came out of the bathroom, only this time he was in focus and not groaning so much. If Pat hadn't been there he would have laid me out with the working end of a billy and laughed while he did it. Not by himself, though.

The two uniformed patrolmen were from a police car and the other two were plain-clothes men from the local precinct. I didn't know any of them and none of them knew me, so we were even. The two plain-clothes men and one cop watched Pat with a knowledge behind their eyes that said, 'So it's one of those things, eh?'

Pat put them straight pretty fast. He shoved a chair under me and took one himself. 'Start from the beginning,' he said. 'I want all of it, Mike; every single detail.'

I leaned back and looked at the body on the floor. Someone had had the decency to cover it with a sheet. 'His name is Chester Wheeler. He owns a department store in Columbus, Ohio. The store's been in his family a long time. He's got a wife and two kids. He was in New York on a buying tour for his business.' I looked at Pat and waited.

'Go on, Mike.'

'I met him in 1945, just after I got back from overseas. We were in Cincinnati during the time when hotel rooms were scarce. I had a room with twin beds and he was sleeping in the lobby. I invited him up to share a bed and he took me up on it. Then he was a captain in the Air Force, some kind of a purchasing agent, working out of Washington. We got drunk together in the morning, split up in the afternoon, and I didn't see him again until last night. I ran into him in a bar where he was brooding into a beer feeling sorry for himself and we had a great reunion. I remember we changed bars about half a dozen times, then he suggested we park here for the night, and we did. I bought a bottle and we finished it after we got up here. I think he began to get maudlin before we hit the sack, but I can't remember all the details. The next thing I knew somebody was beating my head trying to get me up.'

'Is that all?'

'Every bit of it, Pat.'

He stood up and looked around the room. One of the plain-

clothes men anticipated his question and remarked, 'Everything is untouched, sir.'

Pat nodded and knelt over to look at the body. I would liked to have taken a look myself, but my stomach wouldn't stand it. Pat didn't speak to anyone in particular when he said, 'Wound self-inflicted. No doubt about it.' His head jerked up in my direction. 'You know, you're going to lose your licence over this, Mike.'

'I don't know why. I didn't shoot him,' I said sourly.

Fat Face sneered, 'How do you know you didn't, wise guy?'

'I never shoot people when I'm drunk,' I snarled, 'unless they push me around and make like they're tough.'

'Wise guy.'

'Yeah, real wise.'

'Cut it out, the both of you,' Pat snapped. Fat Face shut up and let me alone with my hangover. I slouched across the room to a chair in the corner and slid down into it. Pat was having a conference over by the door that wound up with everyone but Fat Face leaving. The door hadn't closed shut before the coroner came in, complete with wicker basket and pall-bearers.

The little men in my head started up with their hammers and chisels, so I closed my eyes and let my ears do the work. The medical examiner and the cops reached the same conclusion. It was my gun that shot him. A big round .45 fired at very close range. The fingerprint boys picked my prints off the rod and the other guy's too. His were on top.

A call came in for Pat right then and while he was on the phone I heard Fat Face suggest something to the M.E. that brought me straight up in the chair.

Fat Face said, '... Murder just as easy. They were drunk and had an argument. Bright eyes plugged him and put the gun in his hand to make it look like suicide. Then he soused himself up with liquor to make it look good.'

The M.E. bobbed his head. 'Reasonable enough.'

'You dirty fat slob, you!' I came out of the chair like a shot and spun him round on his heels. Cop or no cop, I would have caved his nose in for him if Pat hadn't dropped the phone and stepped in between us. This time he took my arm and didn't let go until he finished his phone call. When the body had been hoisted into the basket and carted off Pat unbuttoned his coat and motioned for me to sit on the bed.

I sat.

He had his hands in his pockets and he spoke as much to the plain-clothes man as to me. His words didn't come easy, but he didn't stumble over them exactly. 'I've been waiting for this, Mike. You and that damn gun of yours were bound to get in trouble.'

'Stow it, Pat. You know I didn't shoot the guy.'

'Do I?'

'Hell, you ought to ...'

'Do you know you didn't?'

'It was a closed room and I was so far gone I didn't even hear the gun go off. You'll get a paraffin test on the body that will prove it anyway. I'll go for one myself and that will settle that. What are we jawing about?'

'About you and that rod, that's what! If the guy was a suicide you'll be up the creek without a licence. They don't like for people to be carrying firearms and a load of liquor too.'

He had me cold on that one. His eyes swept the room, seeing the clothes on the backs of the chairs, the empty whisky bottles on the windowsill, the stubs of cigarettes scattered all over the floor. My gun was on the desk along with a spent casing, with the white powder clotting in the oil showing the prints.

Pat closed his eyes and grimaced. 'Let's go, Mike,' he said.

I put on my coat over the empty holster and squeezed between the two of them for the ride down to headquarters. There was a parking-lot ticket in my pocket, so I didn't worry about my heap. Fat Face had that look in his eyes that said he was hoping I'd make a break for it so he could bounce me one. It was rough having to disappoint the guy.

For once I was glad to have a friend in the department. Pat ran the tests off on me himself and had me stick around downstairs until the report was finished. I had the ashtray half filled before he came back down. 'What did it show?' I asked him.

'You're clean enough. The corpse carried the powder burns all right.'

'That's a relief.'

His eyebrows went up. 'Is it? The D.A. wants to have a little talk with you. It seems that you managed to find an awfully fussy hotel to play around in. The manager raised a stink and carried it all the way upstairs. Ready?'

I got up and followed him to the elevators, cursing my luck for running into an old buddy. What the hell got into the guy anyway? It would have been just as easy for him to jump out the damn window. The elevator stopped and we got out. It would have been better if there was an organ playing a dirge. I was right in the spirit for it.

The D.A. was a guy who had his charming moments, only this time there weren't any photographers around. His face wore a tailor-made look of sarcasm and there was ice in his words. He told me to sit down then perched himself on the edge of the desk. While Pat was running through the details he never took his eyes off me nor let his expression change one bit. If he thought he was getting under my skin with his

professional leer he had another think coming. I was just about to tell him he looked like a frog when he beat me to it.

'You're done in this town, Mr Hammer; I suppose you know that.'

What the hell could I say? He held all the cards.

He slid off the desk and stood at parade rest so I could admire his physique, I guess. 'There were times when you proved yourself quite useful . . . and quite trying. You let yourself get out of hand once too often. I'm sorry it happened this way; but it's my opinion that the city is better off without you or your services.' The D.A. was getting a big whang out of this.

Pat shot him a dirty look, but kept his mouth shut. I wasn't a clam. 'Then I'm just another citizen again?'

'That's right, with no licence and no gun. Nor will you ever have one again.'

'Are you booking me for anything?'

'I can't very well. I wish I could.'

He must have read what was coming in the lopsided grin I gave him because he got red from his collar up. 'For a D.A. you're a pain in the behind,' I said. 'If it wasn't for me the papers would have run you in the comic section long ago.'

'That will be enough, Mr Hammer!'

'Shut your yap or arrest me, otherwise I'll exercise my rights as a citizen, and one of 'em happens to be objecting to the actions of any public official. You've been after my hide ever since you walked into this office because I had sense enough to know where to look for a few killers. It made nice copy for the Press and you didn't even get an honourable mention. All I have to say is this . . . it's a damn good thing the police are civil service. They have to have a little bit of common sense to get where they are. Maybe you were a good lawyer . . . you should have kept at it and quit trying to be king of the cops.'

'Get out of here!' His voice was a short fuse ready to explode any second. I stood up and jammed on my hat. Pat was holding the door open. The D.A. said, 'The very first time you so much as speed down Broadway, I'm going to see to it personally that you're slapped with every charge in the book. That will make good Press copy too.'

I stopped with my hand on the knob and sneered at him, then Pat jerked my sleeve and I closed the door. In the hallway he kept his peace until we reached the stairs; it was as long as he could hold it. 'You're a fool, Mike.'

'Nuts, Pat. It was his game all the way.'

'You could keep your trap closed, couldn't you?'

'No!' I licked the dryness from my lips and stuck a cigarette in my mouth. 'He's been ready for me too long now. The jerk was happy to give me the shaft.'

'So you're out of business.'

'Yeah ; I'll open up a grocery store.'

'It isn't that funny, Mike. You're a private investigator and a good cop when you have to be. There were times when I was glad to have you around. It's over now. Come on in my office . . . we might as well have a drink on it.' He ushered me into his sanctum sanctorum and waved me into a chair. The bottom drawer of his desk had a special niche for a pint bottle and a few glasses, carefully concealed under a welter of blank forms. Pat drew two and handed one over to me. We toasted each other in silence, then spilled them down.

'It was a pretty good show while it lasted,' Pat said.

'Sure was,' I agreed, 'sure was. What happens now?'

He put the bottle and glasses away and dropped into the swivel chair behind his desk. You'll be called in if there's an inquest. The D.A. is liable to make it hard on you out of meanness. Meanwhile, you're clear to do what you please. I vouched for you. Besides, you're too well known to the boys to try to drop out of sight.'

'Buy your bread and butter from me, will you?'

Pat let out a laugh. 'I wish you wouldn't take it so lightly. You're in the little black book right now on the special S-list.'

I pulled out my wallet and slid my licence out of the card case and threw it on his desk. 'I won't be needing that any more.'

He picked it up and examined it sourly. A large envelope on the filing cabinet held my gun and the report sheet. He clipped the card to the form and started to put it back. On second thought he slid the magazine out of the rod and swore. 'That's nice. They put it in here with a full load.' He used his thumb to jack the shells out of the clip, spilling them on the desk.

'Want to kiss old betsy goodbye, Mike?'

When I didn't answer he said, 'What are you thinking of?'

My eyes were squinted almost shut and I started to grin again. 'Nothing,' I said, 'nothing at all.'

He frowned at me while he dumped the stuff back in the envelope and closed it. My grin spread and he started to get mad. 'All right, damn it, what's so funny? I know that look. . . . I've seen it often enough. What's going through that feeble mind of yours?'

'Just thoughts, Pat. Don't be so hard on a poor unemployed pal, will you?'

'Let's hear those thoughts.'

I picked a cigarette out of the container on his desk then put it back after reading the label. I was ~~just thinking~~ of a way to get that ticket back, that's all.'

That seemed to relieve him. He sat down and tugged at his tie. 'It'll be a good trick if you can work it. I can't see how you can.'

I thumbed a match and lit up a smoke. 'It won't be hard.' 'No? You think the D.A. will mail it back to you with his apologies?'

'I wouldn't be a bit surprised.' Pat kicked the swivel chair all the way around and glared at me. 'You haven't got your gun any more, you can't hold him up.'

'No,' I laughed, 'but I can make a deal with him. Either he does mail it back with his apologies or I'll make a sap out of him.'

His palms cracked the desk and he was all cop again. This much wasn't a game. 'Do you know anything, Mike?'

'No more than you. Everything I told you was the truth. It'll be easy to check and your laboratory backs up my statements. The guy was a suicide. I agree with you. He shot himself to pieces and I don't know why or when. All I know is where and that doesn't help. Now, have you heard enough.'

'No, you bastard, I haven't.' This time he was grinning back at me. I shoved my hat on and left him there still grinning. When I closed the door I heard him kick the desk and swear to himself.

I walked out into the glaring brightness of midday, whistling through my teeth, though by rights I should have been in a blue funk. I hopped in a cab at the corner and gave him my office address. All the way uptown I kept thinking about Chester Wheeler, or what was left of him on the rug. An out-and-out suicide and my gun in his mitt, they said. Private citizen Michael Hammer, that's me. No ticket, no gun and no business, even my hangover was gone. The driver let me out in front of my building and I paid him off, walked in and pushed the bell for the elevator.

Velda was curled up in my big leather chair, her head buried in the paper. When I walked in she dropped it and looked at me. There were streaks across her face from wiping away the tears and her eyes were red. She tried to say something, sobbed and bit her lip.

'Take it easy, honey.' I threw my coat on the rack and pulled her to her feet.

'Oh, Mike, what happened?' It had been a long time since I'd seen Velda playing woman like this. My great big beautiful secretary was human after all. She was better this way.

I put my arms around her, running my fingers through the sleek midnight of her hair. I squeezed her gently and she put her head against my cheek. 'Cut it, sugar, nothing is that bad.'

They took away my ticket and made me a Joe Doe. The D.A. finally got me where he wanted me.'

She shook her hair and gave me a light tap in the ribs. 'That insipid little squirt! I hope you clobbered him good!'

I grinned at her G.I. talk. 'I called him a name, that's what I did.'

'You should have clobbered him!' Her head went down on my shoulder and sniffed. 'I'm sorry, Mike. I feel like a jerk for crying.'

She blew her nose on my fancy pocket handkerchief and steered her over to the desk. 'Get the sherry, Velda. Pat and I had a drink to the dissolution of the Mike Hammer enterprise. Now we'll drink to the new business. The S.P.C.D., Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Detectives.'

Velda brought out the makings and poured two short ones. 'It isn't that funny, Mike.'

'I've been hearing that all morning. The funny part is that it's very funny.'

The sherry went down and we had another. I lit a pair of smokes and stuck one between her lips. 'Tell me about it,' she said. The tears were gone now. Curiosity and a little anger were in her eyes, making them snap. For the second time today I rehashed what I knew of it, bringing the story right through the set-to in the D.A.'s office.

When I finished she said some very unladylike curses and threw her cigarette at the waste basket. 'Damn these public officials and their petty grievances, Mike. They'll climb over anybody to get to the top. I wish I could do something instead of sitting here answering your mail. I'd like to turn that pretty boy inside out!' She threw herself into the leather chair and drew her legs up under her.

I reached out a toe and flipped her skirt down. On some people legs are just to reach the ground. On Velda they were a hell of a distraction. 'Your days of answering the mail are over, kid.'

Her eyes got wet again, but she tried to smile it off. 'I know. I can always get a job in a department store. What will you do?'

'Where's your native ingenuity? You used to be full of ideas.' I poured another glass of sherry and sipped it, watching her. For a minute she chewed on her fingernail, then raised her head to give me a puzzled frown.

'What are you getting at, Mike?'

Her bag, a green-leather shoulder-strap affair, was lying on the desk. I raised it and let it fall. It hit the polished wood with a dull clunk. 'You have a gun and a licence to carry it, haven't you? And you have a private operator's ticket

yourself, haven't you? O.K., from now on the business is yours. I'll do the legwork.'

A twitch pulled her mouth into a peculiar grin as she realized what I meant. 'You'll like that, too, won't you?'

'What?'

'The legwork.'

I slid off the edge of the desk and stood in front of her. With Velda I didn't take chances. I reached out a toe again and flipped her dress up to the top of her sheer nylons. She would have made a beautiful calendar. 'If I went for any I'd go for yours, but I'm afraid of that rod you use for ballast in your handbag.'

Her smile was a funny thing that crept up into her eyes and laughed at me from there. I just looked at her, a secretary with a built-in stand-off that had more on the ball than any of the devil's helpers I had ever seen and could hold me over the barrel without saying a word.

'You're the boss now,' I said. 'We'll forget about the mail and concentrate on a very special detail . . . getting my licence and my gun back where it belongs. The D.A. made me out a joker and put the screws on good. If he doesn't send 'em back with a nice, sweet note, the newspapers are going to wheel out the chopping block for the guy.'

'I won't even tell you how to operate. You can call the signals and carry the ball yourself if you want to. I'll only stick my nose in during the practice sessions. But if you're smart, you'll concentrate on the body of Chester Wheeler. When he was alive he was a pretty nice guy, a regular family man. All the grisly details are in the paper there and you can start from that. Meanwhile, I'll be around breaking ground for you and you'll spot my tracks here and there. You'll find some signed blank cheques in the drawer for your expense account.'

I filled the sherry glass up again and drained it in one gulp. It was a beautiful day, a real dilly. My face cracked into a smile that was followed by a short rumble of pleasure.

Once more Velda said, 'It *isn't* funny, Mike.'

I lit another cigarette and pushed my hat back on my head. 'You'll never know how real funny it actually is, kid. You see, only one bullet killed Chester Wheeler. I always carry six in the clip and when Pat emptied it out there were only four of them.'

Velda was watching me with the tip of her tongue clenched between her teeth. There wasn't any kitten-softness about her now. She was big and she was lovely, with the kind of curves that made you want to turn around and have another look. The lush fullness of her lips had tightened into the faintest kind of snarl and her eyes were the carnivorous eyes you could

expect to see in the jungle watching you from behind a clump of bushes.

I said it slowly. 'If you had that gun in your hand pointed at somebody's belly, could you pull the trigger and stand ready to pull it again if you had to?'

She pulled her tongue back and let her teeth close together. 'I wouldn't have to pull it twice. Not now I wouldn't.'

She was watching me as I walked across the office. I looked over my shoulder and waved sô-long, then closed the door fast. She still hadn't bothered to pull her dress back down, and like I'd said, I wasn't taking any chances.

Some day she wasn't going to get so smart with me.

Or maybe she would.

CHAPTER TWO

THE papers were full of it that night. The tabloids had me splashed all over the front pages and part of the middle section. The same guys that hung on my tail when they had wanted a story took me apart at the seams in their columns. Only one bothered to be sentimental about it. He wrote me an epitaph. In rhyme. The D.A. was probably laughing his head off.

In another hour he'd be crying in his beer, the jerk.

I finished off an early supper and stacked the dishes in the sink. They could wait. For fifteen minutes I steamed under a shower until my skin turned pink, then suffered under a cold spray for a few seconds before I stepped out and let a puddle spread around my feet. When I finished shaving I climbed into a freshly pressed suit and transferred a few hundred bucks from the top drawer to my wallet.

I took a look in the mirror and snorted. I could have been a man of distinction except for my face and the loose space in my jacket that was supposed to fit around a rod. That at least I could fix. I strapped on a mighty empty holster to fill out the space under my arm and felt better about it. I looked in the mirror again and grimaced. It was a hell of a shame that I wasn't handsome.

Last night was a vague shadow with only a few bright spots, but before I started to backtrack there was something I wanted to do. It was just past seven o'clock when I found a parking place near the hotel that had caused all the trouble. It was one of those old-fashioned places that catered to even older-fashioned people and no fooling around. Single girls couldn't even register there unless they were over eighty. Before I went in I snapped the back off my watch, pushed out the works and dropped it in my shirt pocket.

The desk clerk wasn't glad to see me. His hand started for the telephone, stopped, then descended on the desk bell three times, loud and clear. When a burly shouldered individual who kept the lobby free of loiterers appeared the clerk looked a little better. At least his shaking stopped.

There wasn't any need to identify myself, 'I lost the works out of my watch last night. I want 'em back.'

'But . . . the room hasn't been cleaned yet,' he blurted.

'I want 'em now,' I repeated. I held out a thick, hairy wrist

and tapped the empty case. The burly guy peered over my shoulder interestedly.

'But ...'

'Now!'

The house dick said, 'I'll go up with 'im and we can look for it, George.'

Evidently the clerk was glad to have his decisions made for him, because he handed over the keys and seemed happy at last.

'This way.' The dick nudged me with his elbow and I followed him. In the elevator he stood with his hands behind his back and glared at the ceiling. He came out of it at the fourth floor to usher me down the hall where he put the key in the lock of number 402.

Nothing had changed. The blood was still on the floor, the beds unmade and the white powder sprinkled liberally around. The dick stood at the door with his arms crossed and kept his eyes on me while I poked around under the furniture.

I went through the room from top to bottom, taking my time about it. The dick got impatient and began tapping his fingernails against the wall. When there was no place left to look the dick said, 'It ain't here. Come on.'

'Who's been here since the cops left?'

'Nobody, feller, not even the cleaning girls. Let's get going. You probably lost that watch in a bar somewhere.'

I didn't answer him. I had flipped back the covers of the bed I slept in and saw the hole right in the edge of the mattress.

Mattress filling can stop a slug like a steel plate and it couldn't have gone in very far, but when I probed the hole with my forefinger all I felt was horsehair and coil springs. The bullet was gone. Someone had beaten me to it. Beaten me to a couple of things . . . the empty shell case was gone too.

I put on a real bright act when I made like I found my watch works under the covers. I held it up for the guy to see then shoved it back in the case. He grunted. 'All right, all right. Let's get moving.' I gave him what was supposed to be a smile of gratitude and walked out. He stuck with me all the way down and was even standing in the doorway to see me go down the street to my car.

Before long he was going to catch all kinds of hell.

So would the desk clerk when the cops got wise to the fact that Chester Wheeler was no more of a suicide than I was. My late friend of the night before had been very neatly murdered.

And I was due for a little bit of hell myself.

I found a saloon with an empty parking place right out in front and threw a buck on the bar. When my beer came I took a nickel from the change and squeezed into a phone-booth

down the end. It was late, but Pat wasn't a guy to leave his office until things were cleaned up and I was lucky this time. I said, 'Michael Q. Citizen, speaking.'

He laughed into the receiver. 'How's the grocery business?'

'Booming, Pat, really booming. I have a large order for some freshly murdered meat.'

'What's that?'

'Just a figure of speech.'

'Oh!'

'By the way, how clear am I on the Wheeler death?'

I could almost see the puzzled frown on his face. . . . 'As far as I can see you can't be held for anything. Why?'

'Just curious. Look, the boys in blue were in that room a long time before I came back to the land of the living. Did they poke around much?'

'No, I don't think so. It was pretty obvious what happened.'

'They take anything out with them?'

'The body,' he said 'Your gun, a shell casing, and Wheeler's personal belongings.'

'That was all?'

'Uh-huh.'

I paused a moment, then: 'Don't suicides generally leave a note, Pat?'

'Generally, yes. That happens when they're sober and there isn't a witness. If they've thought about it awhile they usually try to explain. In a fit of passion they rarely waste the time.'

'Wheeler wasn't a passionate man, I don't think,' I told him. 'From all appearances he was an upright, business man.'

'I thought of that. It was peculiar, wasn't it? Did he look like a suicide type to you?'

'Nope.'

'And he didn't mention anything along that line beforehand. Hmmm!'

I let a few seconds go by. 'Pat . . . how many slugs were left in my rod?'

'Four, weren't there?'

'Correct. And I hadn't shot it since I was on the target range with you last week.'

'So . . . ?' His voice had an uneasy tinge to it.

Real softly I said, 'That gun never has less than six in it, chum.'

If he had been a woman he would have screamed. Instead he bellowed into the phone and I wouldn't answer him. I heard him shouting, 'Mike, goddamn it, answer me. . . . *Mikel!*' . . . I laughed just once to let him know I was still there and hung up.

All he needed was five minutes. By that time he'd have the

D.A. cornered in his office like a scared rabbit. Sure, the D.A. was big stuff, but Pat was no slouch either. He'd tell that guy off with a mouthful of words that would make his hair stand on end and the fair-haired boy of the courts wouldn't dare do a thing.

It was getting funnier all the time. I went back to the bar and drank my beer.

The after-supper crowd began drifting in and taking places at the bar. At eight-thirty I called Velda, but she wasn't home. I tried again an hour later and she still wasn't there. She wasn't at the office either. Maybe she was out hiring a signpainter to change the name on the door.

When I finally shifted into the corner up against the cigarette machine I started to think. It didn't come easy because there hadn't been any reason to remember then and we had let the booze flow free. Last night.

Famous last words.

Last night the both of us had thrown five years to the wind and brought the war back to the present. We were buddies again. We weren't the kind of buddies you get to be when you eat and sleep and fight with a guy, but we were buddies. We were two-strong and fighting the war by ourselves. We were two guys who had met as comrades-in-arms, happy to be on the right side and giving all we had. For one night way back there we had been drinking buddies until we shook hands to go finish the war. Was that the way it was supposed to be? Did some odd quirk of fate throw us together purposely so that later we'd meet again?

Last night I had met him and drank with him. We talked, we drank some more. Was he happy? He was, after we ran into each other. Before that he had been curled over a drink at the bar. He could have been brooding. He could have been thinking. But he was happy as hell to see me again! Whatever it was he had been thinking about was kicked aside along with those five years and we had ourselves one hell of a drinking bout. Sure, we fought the war again. We did the same thing anybody else did when they caught up with someone they knew from those days. We talked it and we fought it and we were buddies again decked out in the same uniform ready to give everything for the other guy on our side whether we knew him or not. But the war had to give out sometime. The peace always has to come when people get too tired of fighting. And yet, it was the end of our talk that brought the war back to his eyes. He hadn't wanted it to stop or be covered over other channels. He told me he had been in town a week and was getting set to go home. The whole deal was a business trip to do some buying for his store.

Yeah, we were buddies. We weren't buddies long, but we were buddies good. If we had both been in the jungle and some slimy Jap had picked him off I would have rammed the butt of a rifle down the brown bastard's throat for it. He would have done the same for me, too. But we weren't in any damn jungle. We were right here in New York City where murder wasn't supposed to happen and did all the time. A guy I liked comes into my own city and a week later he's dead as hell.

One week. What did he do? What happened? Who was he with? Where was the excuse for murder, here or in Columbus, Ohio? A whole damn week. I slapped my hat on the stool to reserve it and took another few nickels from my change and wormed into the phone-booth again. There was one other question. What was I going to do about it? My face started to go tight again and I knew the answer.

I dialled two numbers. The second got my man. He was a private investigator the same as I used to be except that he was essential, honest and hard-working. His name was Joe Gill and he owed me a favour that he and his staff could begin repaying as of now.

I said, 'This is Mike, Joe. Remember me?'

'Hell,' he laughed, 'with all your publicity how could I forget you? I hope you aren't after a job.'

'Not exactly. Look, you tied up right now?'

'Well . . . no. Something on your mind?'

'Plenty, friend. You still doing insurance work?'

Joe grunted an assent. 'That's *all* I'm doing. You can keep your guns and your tough guys. I'll track down missing beneficiaries.'

'Care to do me a favour, Joe?'

He only hesitated a second. 'Glad to, Mike. You've steered me straight plenty of times. Just name it.'

'Swell. This guy that died in the hotel room with me—Chester Wheeler—I want some information on him. Not a history . . . I just want him backtracked over the past week. He's been in town doing some buying for his store in Columbus, Ohio, and I want a record of what he'd done since he hit town. Think it can be done?'

I could hear his pencil rasping on paper. 'Give me a few hours. I'll start it myself and put the chain gang out on the details. Where can I reach you?'

I thought a moment, then told him. 'Try the Greenwood Hotel. It's a little dump on a side street up in the Eighties. They don't ask questions there.'

'Right! See you later.'

I cradled the receiver and picked my way back through the crowd to the bar. My hat was hanging over a pin-up lamp.

the wall and my seat was occupied and the guy was spending my money for beer.

I didn't get mad, though. The guy was Pat.

The bartender put down another beer and took some more of my change. I said, 'How's tricks, kid?'

Pat turned around slowly and looked at me for the first time. His eyes were clouded and his mouth had a grim twist to it. He looked tired and worried. 'There's a back room, Mike. Let's go sit down. I want to talk to you.'

I gulped my beer down and carried a full one back to the booth. When I slid my deck of Luckies across the table to him he shook his head and waited until I lit up. I asked, 'How did you find me?'

He didn't answer. Instead, he popped one of his own, very softly, very forcefully. He wasn't kidding around. 'What's it all about, Mike?'

'What's what?'

'You know.' He leaned forward on his arms, never taking his eyes off my face. 'Mike, I'm not going to get excited this time. I'm not going to let you talk me into losing a lot of sleep any more. I'm a police officer, or at least I'm supposed to be. Right now I'm treating this like it might be something important and like you know more about it than I do. I'm asking questions that are going to be answered. What's going on?'

Smoke drifted into my eyes and I squinted them almost shut. 'Supposing I told you Chester Wheeler was murdered. Pat.'

'I'd ask how, then who.'

'I don't know how and I don't know who.'

'Then why, Mike? Why is it murder?'

'Two shots were fired from my gun, that's why.'

He gave the table a rap with his knuckles. 'Damn you, Mike. come out with it! We're friends; but I'm tired of being hamstrung. You're forever smelling murder where murder isn't and making it come out right. Play it square!'

'Don't I always?'

'With reservations!'

I gave a sour laugh. 'Two shots out of that rod. Isn't that enough?'

'Not for me it isn't. Is that all you have?'

I nodded and dragged in on the butt.

Pat's face seemed to soften and he let the air out of his lungs slowly. He even smiled a little. 'I guess that's that, Mike. I'm glad I didn't get sweated up about it.'

I snubbed the cigarette out on the table top. 'Now you've got me going. What are you working up to?'

'Precedent, Mike. I'm speaking of past suicides.'

'Every so often we find a suicide with a bullet in his head. The room has been liberally peppered with bullets, to quote a cliché. In other words, they'll actually take the gun away from the target, but pull the trigger anyway. They keep doing it until they finally have nerve enough to keep it there. Most guys can't handle an automatic anyway and they fire a shot to make sure they know how it operates.'

'And that makes Wheeler a bona-fide suicide—right?'

He grinned at the sneer on my face. 'Not altogether. When you pulled your little razzmatazz about the slugs in your gun I went up in the air and had a handful of experts dig up Wheeler's itinerary and we located a business friend he had been with the day before he died. He said Wheeler was unusually depressed and talked of suicide several times. Apparently his business was on the down-grade.'

'Who was the guy, Pat?'

'A handbag manufacturer, Emil Perry. Well, if you have any complaints, come see me, but no more scares, Mike. O.K.?'

'Yeah,' I hissed. 'You still didn't say how you found me.'

'I traced your call, friend citizen. It came from a bar and I knew you'd stay there awhile. I took my time at the hotel checking your story. And, er . . . yes, I did find the bullet hole in the mattress.'

'I suppose you found the bullet, too?'

'Why, yes, we did. The shell case, too.' I sat there rigid, waiting. 'It was right out there in the hall where you dropped it, Mike. I wish you'd quit trying to give this an element of mystery just to get me in on it.'

'You chump!'

'Can it, Mike! The house dick set me straight.'

I was standing up facing him and I could feel the mad running right down into my shoes. 'I thought you were smart, Pat. You chump!'

This time he winked. 'No more games, huh, Mike?' He grinned at me a second and left me standing there watching his back. Now I was playing games. Hot dog!

I thought I was swearing under my breath until a couple of mugs heard their tomatoes complain and started to give me hell. When they saw my face they told their dames to mind their business and went on drinking.

Well, I asked for it. I played it cute and Pat played it cuter. Maybe I was the chump. Maybe Wheeler did kill himself. Maybe he came back from the morgue and tried to slip out with the slug and the shell too.

I sure as a four-letter word didn't. I picked up my pack of butts and went out on the street for a smell of fresh air that

wasn't jammed with problems. After a few deep breaths I felt better.

Down on the corner a drugstore was getting rid of its counter customers and I walked in past the tables of novelties and cosmetics to a row of phone-booths in the back. I pulled the Manhattan directory out of the rack and began thumbing through it. When I finished I did the same thing with the Brooklyn book. I didn't learn anything there, so I pulled up the Bronx listing and found an Emil Perry who lived in one of the better residential sections of the community.

At ten minutes after eleven I parked outside a red-brick, one-family house and killed the motor. The car in front of me was a new Cadillac sedan with all the trimmings and the side door bore two gold initials in Old English script, E.P.

There was a brass knocker on the door of the house, embossed with the same initials, but I didn't use it. I had the thing raised when I happened to glance in the window. If the guy was Emil Perry, he was big and fat with a fortune in jewels stuck in his tie and flashing on his fingers. He was talking to somebody out of sight and licking his lips between every word.

You should have seen his face. He was scared silly.

I let the knocker down easy and eased back into the shadows. When I looked at my watch ten minutes had gone by and nothing happened. I could see the window through the shrubs and the top of the fat man's head. He still hadn't moved. I kept on waiting and a few minutes later the door opened just far enough to let a guy out. There was no light behind him so I didn't see his face until he was opposite me. Then I grinned a nasty little grin and let my mind give Pat a very soft horse-laugh.

The guy that came out only had one name—Rainey. He was a tough punk with a record as long as your arm and he used to be available for any kind of job that needed a strong arm.

I waited until Rainey walked down the street and got in a car. When it pulled away with a muffled roar I climbed into my own heap and turned the motor over.

I didn't have to see Mr Perry after all. Anyway, not tonight. He wasn't going anywhere. I made a U-turn at the end of the street and got back on the main drag that led to Manhattan. When I reached the Greenwood Hotel a little after midnight the night clerk shoved the register at me, took cash in advance and handed me the keys to the room. Fate with a twisted sense of humour was riding my tail again. The room was 402.

If there was a dead man in it tomorrow it'd have to be me.

I dreamt I was in a foxhole with a shelter half-dragged over me to keep out the rain. The guy in the next foxhole kept calling to me until my eyes opened and my hand automatically reached for my rifle. There was no rifle; but the voice was real. It came from the hall. I threw back the covers and hopped up, trotting for the door.

Joe slid in and closed it behind him. 'Cripes,' he grunted, 'I thought you were dead.'

'Don't say that word. I'm alone tonight. You get it?'

He flipped his hat to the chair and sat on it. 'Yeah, I got it. Most of it anyway. They weren't very co-operative at the hotel seeing as how the cops had just been there. What did you do to 'em?'

'Gave him a steer. Now the honourable Captain of Homicide, my pal, my buddy who ought to know better, thinks I'm pulling fast ones on him as a joke. He even suspects me of having tampered with some trivial evidence.'

'Did you?'

'It's possible. Of course, how would I know what's evidence and what's not. After all, what does it matter if it was a suicide?'

Joe gave a polite burp. 'Yeah,' he said.

I watched him while he felt around in his pocket for a fistful of notes. He tapped them with a forefinger. 'If I charged you for this you'd of shelled out a pair of C's. Six men lost their sleep, three lost their dates and one caught hell from his wife. She wants him to quit me. And for what?'

'And for what?' I repeated.

He went on: 'This Wheeler fellow seemed pretty respectable. By some very abstract questioning here and there we managed to backtrack his movements. Just remember, we had to do it in a matter of hours, so it isn't a minute-by-minute account.'

'He checked in at the hotel immediately upon arriving eight days ago. His mornings were spent visiting merchandising houses here in the city where he placed some regular orders for items for his store. None of these visits were of unusual importance. Here are some that may be. He wired home to Columbus, Ohio, to a man named Ted Lee asking for five thousand bucks by return wire. He received it an hour later. I presume it was to make a special purchase of some sort.'

'We dug up a rather sketchy account of where he spent his evenings. A few times he returned to the hotel slightly under the influence. One night he attended a fashion show that featured a presentation of next year's styles. The show was followed by cocktails and he may have been one of the men who helped one of a few models who had a couple too many down the elevator and into a cab.'

I started to grin. 'Models?'

He shook his head. 'Forget it.' He said me. 'I was' a smoker with a dirty floor show for dinner.'

'O.K., go on.'

'From then on he was in and out of the bread periodically and each time he had a little more of a jag on. He checked in with you and was dead before morning. The bread was very put out. That's it.'

He waited a second and repeated. 'That's it. I said.'

'I heard you.'

'Well?'

'Joe, you're a lousy detective.'

He shot me an impatient glance tainted with amusement. 'I'm a lousy detective? You without a licence and I'm the lousy detective? That's a hell of a way of thanking me for all my trouble! Why, I've found more missing persons than you have hairs on that low forehead of yours and ...'

'Ever shoot anybody, Joe?'

His face went white and his fingers had trouble taking the cigarette out of his mouth. 'Once ... I did.'

'Like it?'

'No.' He licked his lips. 'Look, Mike ... this guy Wheeler ... you were there. He was a suicide, wasn't he?'

'Uh-uh. Somebody gave him the business.'

I could hear him swallow clear across the room. 'Uh ... you won't need me again, will you?'

'Nope. Thanks a lot, Joe. Leave the notes on the bed.'

The sheaf of papers fell on the bed and I heard the door close softly. I sat on the arm of the chair and let my mind weave the angles in and out. One of them had murder in it.

Some place there was a reason for murder big enough to make the killer try to hide the fact under a cloak of suicide. But the reason has to be big to kill. It has to be even bigger to try to hide it. It was still funny the way it came out. I was the only one who could tag it as murder and make it stick. Some place a killer thought he was being real clever. Clever as hell. Maybe he thought the lack of one lousy shell in the clip wouldn't be noticed.

I kept on thinking about it and I got sore. It made me sore twice. The first time I burned up was because the killer took me for a sap. Who the hell did he think I was—a cheap uptown punk who carried a rod for effect? Did he think I was some goon with loose brains and stupid enough to take it lying down?

Then I got mad again because it was my friend that died. My friend, not somebody else's. A guy who was glad to see me even after five years. A guy who was on the same side with me and

gave the best he could give to save some bastard's neck so that bastard could kill him five years later.

The army was one thing I should have reminded Pat of. I should have prodded his memory with the fact that the army meant guns and no matter who you were an indoctrination course in most of the phases of handling lethal weapons hit you at one time or another. Maybe Chester Wheeler *did* try to shoot himself. More likely he tried to fire it at someone or someone fired it at him. One thing I knew damn well: Chet had known all about automatics and if he did figure to knock himself off he wasn't going to fire any test shot just to see if the gun worked.

I rolled into bed and yanked the covers up. I'd sleep on it.

CHAPTER THREE

I STOOD on the corner of Thirty-third Street and checked the address from Joe's notes. The number I wanted was halfway down the block, an old place recently remodelled and refitted with all the trimmings a flashy clientele could expect. While I stared at the directory a covey of trim young things clutching hatboxes passed behind me to the elevator and I followed them in. They were models, but their minds weren't on jobs. All they talked about was food. I didn't blame them a bit. In the downstairs department they were shipshape from plenty of walking, but upstairs it was hard to tell whether they were coming or going unless they were wearing falsies. They were pretty to look at, but I wouldn't give any of them bed room.

The elevator slid to a stop at the eighth floor and the dame got out. They walked down the corridor to a pair of full length, frosted plate-glass doors etched with ANTON LIPSEK AGENCY and pushed in. The last one saw me coming and held the door open for me.

It was a streamlined joint if ever there was one. The walls were a light pastel tint with a star-sprinkled ceiling of pale blue. Framed original photos of models in everything from nylon step-ins to low-slung convertibles marched around the walls in a double column. Three doors marked PRIVATE branched off the anteroom, while a receptionist flanked by a host of busy stenos pounding typewriters guarded the entrance to the main office.

I dumped my cigarette into an ash tray and grinned at the receptionist. Her voice had a forced politeness, but her eyes were snooty. 'Yes?'

'The Calway Merchandising Company had a dinner meeting the other night. Several models from this agency were present for the fashion show that came later. I'm interested in seeing them . . . one of them, at least. How can I go about it?'

She tapped her pencil on the desk. Three irritable little taps. Evidently this was an old story to her. 'Is this a business or . . . personal inquiry, sir?'

I leaned on the edge of the desk and gave her my real nasty smile. 'It could be both, kid, but one thing it's not and that's your business.'

'Oh! . . . oh!' she said. 'Anton—Mr Lipsek, I mean—he handles the assignments. I'll . . . call him.'

Her hands flew over the intercom box, fumbling with the keys. Maybe she thought I'd bite, because she wouldn't take her eyes off my face. When the box rattled at her she shut it off and said I could go right in. This time I gave her my nice smile, the one without the teeth. 'I was only kidding, sugar.'

She said 'Oh!' again and didn't believe me.

Anton Lipsek had his name on the door in gold letters and under it the word MANAGER. Evidently he took his position seriously. His desk was a roll-top affair shoved in a corner, bulging with discarded photographs and sketches. The rest of the room was given over to easels, display mounts and half-finished sketches. He was very busy managing, too.

He was managing to get a whole lot of woman, dressed in very little nothing, in place amid a bunch of props so the camera would pick up most of the nothing she was wearing and none of the most she was showing. At least that's what it looked like to me.

I whistled softly. 'Ve-ry nice.'

'Too much skin,' he said. He didn't even turn around.

The model tried to peer past the glare of the lamps he had trained on her. 'Who's that?'

Anton slushed her, his hands on her nice bare flesh giving a cold professional twist to her torso. When she was set just right he stepped back behind the camera, muttered a cue and the girl let a ghost of a smile play with her mouth. There was a barely audible click and the model turned human again.

They could make me a manager any day.

Anton snapped off the lights and swivelled his head around.

'Ah, yes! Now, sir, what can I do for you?'

He was a tall, lanky guy with eyebrows that met above his nose and a scrimy little goatee that waggled when he talked and made his chin come to a point. 'I'm interested in finding a certain model. She works here.'

The eyebrows went up like a window shade. 'That, sir, is a request we get quite often. Yes, quite often.'

I said very bluntly. 'I don't like models. Too flat-chested.'

Anton was beginning to look amazed when she came out from behind the props, this time with shoes on, too. 'Tain't me you're talkin' about, podner.' An unlit cigarette was dangling from her mouth. 'Got a light?'

I held a match under her nose, watching her mouth purse around the cigarette when she drew in the flame. 'No, you're exceptional,' I said.

This time she grinned and blew the smoke in my face.

Anton coughed politely. 'This, er, model you mentioned. Do you know her?'

'Nope. All I know is that she was at the Calway Merchandising affair the other night.'

'I see. There were several of our young ladies present on that assignment, I believe. Miss Reeves booked that herself. Would you care to see her?'

'Yeah, I would.'

The girl blew another mouthful of smoke at me and her eyelashes waved hello again. 'Don't you ever wear clothes?' I asked her.

'Not if I can help it. Sometimes they make me.'

'That's what I'd like to do.'

'What?'

'Make you.'

Anton choked and clucked, giving her a push. 'That will be enough. If you don't mind, sir, this way.' His hand was inviting me to a door in the side of the room. 'These young ladies are getting out of hand. Sometimes I could ...'

'Yeah, so could I.' He choked again and opened the door.

I heard him announce my name, but I didn't catch what he said because my mind couldn't get off the woman behind the desk. Some women are beautiful, some have bodies that make you forget beauty; here was a woman who had both. Her face had a supernatural loveliness as if some master artist had improved on nature itself. She had her hair cut short in the latest fashion, light tawny hair that glistened like a halo. Even her skin had a creamy texture, flowing down the smooth line of her neck into firm, wide shoulders. She had the breasts of youth—high, exciting, pushing against the high neckline of the white jersey blouse, revolting at the need for restraint. She stood up and held her hand out to me, letting it slip into mine with a warm, pleasant grip. Her voice had a ~~the same~~ quality when she introduced herself, but I was too busy ~~with~~ the longer hemlines to get it. When she sat down ~~again~~ with her legs crossed I stopped my silent protests of long ~~crank~~ ~~when~~ I saw how tantalizingly nice they could mould themselves to the roundness of thighs that were more inviting ~~than~~ ~~any~~ ~~other~~. Only then did I see the nameplate on the desk ~~that read~~ ~~MISS~~ REEVES.

Juno, queen of the lesser gods and goddesses. ~~She was~~ ~~named~~.

She offered me a drink from a decanter in a ~~bar~~ ~~and~~ ~~I~~ took it, something sweet and perfumy in a ~~long-necked~~ glass.

We talked. My voice would get a ~~nasty~~ ~~reaction~~ ~~from~~ ~~her~~ ~~and~~ would get polite. It didn't seem to come out of me ~~at all~~. We could have talked about nothing for an hour ~~and~~ ~~she~~ ~~was~~ ~~still~~ ~~there~~.

minutes. But we talked and she did things with her body deliberately as if I were a supreme test of her abilities as a woman and she laughed, knowing too well that I was hardly conscious of what I was saying or how I was reacting.

She sipped her drink and laid the glass down on the desk, the dark polish of her nails in sharp contrast against the gleaming crystal. Her voice eased me back to the present.

'This young lady, Mr Hammer . . . you say she left with your friend?'

'I said she *may* have. That's what I want to find out.'

'Well, perhaps I can show you their photographs and you can identify her.'

'No, that won't do it. I never saw her myself either.'

'Then why . . .'

'I want to find out what happened that night, Miss Reeves.'

'Juno, please.'

I grinned at her.

'Do you suppose they did . . .' she smiled obliquely, 'anything wrong?'

'I don't give a damn what they did. I'm just interested in knowing. You see, this pal of mine . . . he's dead.'

Her eyes went soft. 'Oh, I'm awfully sorry. What happened?'

'Suicide, the cops said.'

Juno folded her lower lip between her teeth, puzzled. 'In that case, Mr Hammer . . .'

'Mike,' I said.

'In that case, Mike, why bring the girl into it? After all . . .'

'The guy had a family,' I cut in. 'If a nosy reporter decides to work out an angle and finds a juicy scandal lying around, the family will suffer. If there's anything like that I want to squelch it.'

She nodded slowly, complete understanding written in her face. 'You *are* right, Mike. I'll see the girls as they come in for assignments and try to find out who it was. Will you stop by tomorrow sometime?'

I stood up, my hat in my hand. 'That'll be fine, Juno. Tomorrow then.'

'Please.' Her voice dropped into a lower register as she stood up and held her hand out to me again. Every motion she made was like liquid being poured and there was a flame in her eyes that waited to be breathed into life. I wrapped my hand around hers just long enough to feel her tighten it in subtle invitation.

I walked to the door and turned around to say goodbye again. Juno let her eyes sweep over me, up and down, and she smiled. I couldn't get the words out. Something about her made me too warm under my clothes. She was beautiful and

she was built like a goddess should be built and her eyes said that she was good when she was bad.

They said something else, too, something I should know and couldn't remember.

When I got to the elevators I found I had company. This company was waiting for me at the far end of the hall, comfortably braced against the radiator smoking a cigarette.

This time she had more clothes on. When she saw me coming she ground the butt under her heel and walked up to me with such deliberate purpose that my eyes began to undress her all over again.

'Make me,' she said.

'I need an introduction first.'

'Like hell you do.' The light over the elevator turned red and I heard the car rattling in the well.

When we hit the ground floor she linked her arm in mine and let me lead her out to the street. We reached Broadway before she said, 'If you *really* need an introduction, my name is Connie Wales. Who're you?'

'Mr Michael Hammer, chick. I used to be a private investigator. I was in the papers recently.'

Her mouth was drawn up in a partial smile. 'Wow, am I in company.'

We reached Broadway and turned north. Connie didn't ask where we were going, but when we passed three bars in a row without stopping I got an elbow in the ribs until I got the hint. The place I did turn into was a long, narrow affair with tables for ladies in the rear. So we took a table for ladies as far down as we could get, with a waiter mumbling under his breath behind us.

Both of us ordered beer and I said, 'You're not very expensive to keep, are you?'

'Your change'll last longer this way,' she laughed. 'You aren't rich, or are you?'

'I got dough,' I said, 'but you won't get it out of me, girlie.' I tacked on.

Her laugh made pretty music and it was real. 'Most men want to buy me everything I look at. Wouldn't you?' She sipped her brew, watching me over the rim of the glass with eyes as shiny as new dimes.

'Maybe a beer, that's all. A kid I knew once told me I'd never have to pay for another damn thing. Not a thing at all.'

She looked at me soberly. 'She was right.'

'Yeah,' I agreed.

The waiter came back with his tray and four more beers. He sat two in front of each of us, picked up the cash and shuffled

away. As he left, Connie stared at me for a full minute. 'What were you doing in the studio?'

I told her the same thing I told Juno.

She shook her head. 'I don't believe you.'

'Why?'

'I don't know. It just doesn't sound right. Why would any reporter try to make something out of a suicide?'

She had a point there; but I had an answer. 'Because he didn't leave a farewell note. Because his home life was happy. Because he had a lot of dough and no apparent worries.'

'It sounds better now,' she said.

I told her about the party and what I thought might have happened. When I sketched it in I asked, 'Do you know any of the girls that were there that night?'

Her laugh was a little deeper this time. 'Golly, no, at least not to talk to. You see, the agency is divided into two factions, more or less—the clotheshorses and the no-clotheshorses. I'm one of the sugar pies who fill out panties and nighties for the nylon trade. The clotheshorses couldn't fill out a paper sack by themselves so they're jealous and treat us lesser-paid kids like dirt.'

'Nuts,' I said. 'I saw a few and they can't let their breaths out all the way without losing their falsies.'

She almost choked on her drink. 'Very cute, Mike, very cute. I'll have to remember all your acid witticisms. They'll put me over big with the gang.'

I finished the last of the beer and shoved the empties to the edge of the table. 'Come on, kid, I'll take you wherever you want to go then I'll try to get something done.'

'I want to go back to my apartment with you.'

'You'll get a slap in the ear if you don't shut up. Come on.'

Connie threw her head back and laughed at me again. 'Boy, oh, boy, what ten other guys wouldn't give to hear me say that!'

'Do you say that to ten other guys?'

'No, Mike.' Her voice was a whisper of invitation.

There wasn't an empty cab in sight so we walked along Broadway until we found a hack-stand with a driver grabbing a nap behind the wheel. Connie slid in and gave him an address on Sixty-second Street then crowded me into the corner and reached for my hand.

She said, 'Is all this very important, Mike? Finding the girl and all, I mean.'

I patted her hand. 'It means plenty to me, baby. More than you'd expect.'

'Can I . . . help you some way? I want to, Mike. Honest.'

She had a hell of a cute face. I turned my head and looked

down into it and the seriousness in her expression made me nod before I could help myself. 'I need a lot of help, Connie. I'm not sure my friend went out with this girl; I'm not sure she'll admit it if she did and I can't blame her; I'm not sure about anything any more.'

'What did Juno tell you?'

'Come back tomorrow. She'll try to find her in the meantime.'

'Juno's quite a . . . she's quite a . . . ?'

'Quite,' I finished.

'She makes that impression on everybody. A working girl doesn't stand a chance around that woman.' Connie faked a pout and squeezed my arm. 'Say it ain't so, Mike.'

'It ain't so.'

'You're lying again,' she laughed. 'Anyway, I was thinking. Suppose this girl *did* go out with your friend. Was he the type to try for a fast affair?'

I shoved my hat back on my head and tried to picture Chester Wheeler. To me he was too much of a family man to make a decent wolf. I told her no, but doubtfully. It's hard to tell what a guy will or won't do when he's in town without an overseer or a hard-working conscience.

'In that case,' Connie continued, 'I was thinking that if this girl played games like a lot of them do, she'd drag him around the hot spots with him footing the bill. It's a lot of fun, they tell me.'

She was getting at something. She shook her head and let her hair swirl around her shoulders. 'Lately the clotheshorses have been beating a path to a few remote spots that cater to the model-and-buyer crowd. I haven't been there myself, but it's a lead.'

I reached over and tipped her chin up with my forefinger. 'I like the way you think, girl.' Her lips were full and red. She ran her tongue over them until they glistened wetly, separated just a little to coax me closer. I could have been coaxed, only the cab jolted to a stop against the kerb and Connie stuck out her tongue at the driver. She made a wry face and held on to my hand just to be sure I got out with her. I handed the driver a bill and told him to keep the change.

'It's the cocktail hour, Mike. You will come up, won't you?'

'For a while.'

'Damn you,' she said, 'I never tried so hard to make a guy who won't be made.'

The place was a small-sized apartment house that made no pretence at glamour. It had a work-it-yourself elevator that wasn't working and we hoofed it up the stairs to the third floor where Connie fumbled in her pocket until she found her key. I

snapped on the light like I lived there permanently and threw my hat on a chair in the living-room and sat down.

Connie said, 'What'll it be, coffee or coektails?'

'Coffee first,' I told her. 'I didn't eat lunch. If you got some eggs put them on too.' I reached over the arm of the chair into a magazine rack and came up with a handful of girlie mags that were better than the postcards you get in Mexico. I found Connie in half of them and decided that she was all right. Very all right.

The smell of the coffee brought me into the kitchen just as she was sliding the eggs on to a plate and we didn't bother with small talk until there was nothing left but some congealed egg yolk. When I finally leaned back and pulled out my deck of Luckies she said, 'Good?'

'Uh-huh.'

We had the cocktails in the living-room. The hands on my watch went round once, then twice. Every so often the shaker would be refilled and the ice would make sharp sounds against the metal surface. I sat there with a glass in my hand and my head back, dreaming my way through the haze. I ran out of matches and whenever I put a cigarette in my mouth Connie would come across the room with a light for me.

A nice guy who was dead.

Two shots gone.

One bullet and one shell case found in the hall.

Suicide.

Hell.

I opened my eyes and looked at Connie. She was curled up on a studio couch watching me. 'What's the programme, kid?'

'It's almost seven,' she said. 'I'll get dressed and you can take me out. If we're lucky maybe we can find out where your friend went.'

I was too tired to be nice. My eyes were heavy from looking into the smoke that hung in the air and my belly felt warm from the drinks. 'A man is dead,' I said slowly. 'The papers said what the cops said, he died a suicide. I know better. The guy was murdered.'

She stiffened, and the cigarette bent in her fingers. 'I wanted to find out why so I started tracing and I found he might have been with a babe one night. I find where that babe works and start asking questions. A very pretty model with a very pretty body starts tossing me a line and is going to help me look. I start getting ideas. I start wondering why all the concern from a dame who can have ten other guys yet makes a pass at a guy who hasn't even got a job and won't buy her more than beer and takes her eggs and coffee and her cocktails.'

Her breath made a soft hissing noise between her teeth. I

saw the cigarette crumple up in her hand and if she felt any pain it wasn't reflected in her face. I never moved while she pushed herself up. My hands were folded behind my head for a cushion and stayed there even while she stood spraddle-legged in front of me.

Connie swung so fast I didn't close my eyes for it. Not a flat palm, but a small, solid fist sliced into my cheek and cracked against my jaw. I started to taste the blood inside my mouth. and when I grinned a little of it ran down my chin.

'I have five brothers,' she said. Her voice had a snarl in it. 'They're big and nasty, but they're all men. I have ten other guys who wouldn't make one man put together. Then you came along. I'd like to beat your stupid head off. You have eyes and you can't see. All right, Mike, I'll give you something to look at and you'll know why all the concern.'

Her hand grabbed her blouse at the neckline and ripped it down. Buttons rolled away at my feet. The other thing she wore pulled apart with a harsh tearing sound and she stood there proudly, her hands on her hips, flaunting her breasts in my face. A tremor of excitement made the muscles under the taut flesh of her stomach undulate, and she let me look at her like that as long as it pleased me.

I had to put my hands down and squeeze the arms of the chair. My collar was too tight all of a sudden, and something was crawling up my spine.

Her teeth were clamped together. Her eyes were vicious.

'Make me,' she said.

Another trickle of blood ran down my chin, reminding me what had happened. I reached up and smacked her across the mouth as hard as I could. Her head rocked, but she still stood there, and now her eyes were more vicious than ever. 'Still want me to make you?'

'Make me,' she said.

CHAPTER FOUR

WE ate supper in a Chinese joint on Times Square. The place was crowded but nobody had eyes for the meal; they were all focused on Connie, including mine, and I couldn't blame them any. If low-cut gowns were daring, then she took the dare and threw it back at them.

I sat across the table wondering if skin could really be that soft and smooth, wondering how much less could be worn before a woman would be stark naked. Not much less.

The meal went that way without words. We looked, we smiled, we ate. For the first time I saw her objectively, seeing a woman I had and not just one I wanted. It was easy to say she was beautiful, but not easy to say why.

But I knew why. She was honest and direct. She wanted something and she let you know it. She had spent a lifetime with five men who treated her as another brother and expected her to like it. She did. To Connie, modelling was just a job. If there was glamour attached to it she took it without making the most of it.

It was nearly nine o'clock when we left, straggling out with full bellies and a pleasant sensation of everything being almost all-right. I said, 'Going to tell me the schedule?'

Her hand found mine and tucked it up under her arm. 'Ever been slumming, Mike?'

'Some people think I'm always slumming.'

'Well, that's what we're going to do. The kids all have a new craze on an old section of the town. They call it The Bowery. Sound familiar?'

I looked at her curiously. 'The Bowery?'

'You ain't been around recently, bub. The Bowery's changed. Not all of it, but a spot here and there. Not too long ago a wise guy spotted himself a fortune and turned a junk joint into a tourist trap. You know, lousy with characters off the street to give the place atmosphere, all the while catering to a slightly upper crust who want to see how the other half lives.'

'How the hell did they ever find that?'

A cab saw me wave and pulled to the kerb. We got in and I told him where to go and his hand hit the flag. Connie said, 'Some people get tired of the same old thing. They hunt up these new deals. The Bowery is one of them.'

'Who runs the place?'

Connie shrugged, her shoulders rubbing against mine. 'I don't know, Mike. I've had everything second hand. Besides, it isn't only one place now. I think there're at least a dozen. Like I said, they're model-and-buyer hangouts, and nothing is cheap, either.'

The cab wound through traffic, cut over to a less busy street and made the running lights that put us at the nether end of Manhattan without a stop. I handed the driver a couple of bills and helped Connie out of the door.

The Bowery, a street of people without faces. Pleading voices from the shadows and the shuffle of feet behind you. An occasional tug at your sleeve and more pleading that had professional despair in the tone. An occasional woman with clothes too tight giving you a long, steady stare that said she was available cheap. Saloon doors swung open so frequently they seemed like blinking lights. They were crowded, too. The bars were lined with the left-overs of humanity keeping warm over a drink or nursing a steaming bowl of soup.

It had been a long time since I had made the rounds down here. A cab swung into the kerb and a guy in a tux with a red-head on his arm got out laughing. There was a scramble in his direction and the redhead handed out a mess of quarters, then threw them all over the pavement to laugh all the louder when the dive came.

The guy thought it was funny, too. He did the same thing with a fin, letting it blow out of his hand down the street.

Connie said, 'See what I mean?'

I felt like kicking the bastard. 'Yeah, I see.'

We followed the pair with about five feet between us. The guy had a Mid-Western drawl and the dame was trying to cover up a Brooklyn accent. She kept squeezing the guy's arm and giving him the benefit of slow, sidewise glances he seemed to like. Tonight he was playing king all right.

They turned into a bar that was the crummiest of the lot on the street. You could smell the stink from outside and hear the mixture of shrill and raucous voices a block away. A sign over the doorway said NEIL'S JOINT.

The characters were there in force. They had black eyes and missing teeth. They had twitches and fleas and their language was out of the gutter. Two old hags were having a hair-pull over a joker who could hardly hold on to the bar.

What got me was the characters who watched them. They were even worse. They thought it was a howl. Tourists. Lousy, money-heavy tourists who thought it was a lot of fun to kick somebody else around. I was so damn mad I could hardly speak. A waiter mumbled something and led us to a table in the back room that was packed with more characters. Both kinds.

Everybody was having a swell time reading the dirty writing on the walls and swapping stories with the other half. The pay-off was easy to see. The crowd who lived there were drinking cheap whisky on the house to keep them there while the tourists shelled out through the nose for the same cheap whisky and thought it was worth it.

It sure was fun. Nuts!

Connie smiled at a couple of girls she knew and one came over. I didn't bother to get up when she introduced us. The girl's name was Kate and she was with a crowd from upstate. She said, 'First time you've been here, isn't it, Connie?'

'First . . . and last,' she told her. 'It smells.'

Kate's laugh sounded like a broken cowbell. 'Oh, we're not going to stay here long. The fellows want to spend some money, so we're going over to the Inn. Feel like coming along?'

Connie looked at me. I moved my head just enough so she'd know it was O.K. by me. 'We'll go, Kate.'

'Swell, come on over and meet the gang. We're meeting the rest later on. They wanted to see all the sights including . . .' she giggled, 'those houses where . . . you know.' She giggled again.

Connie made a mouth and I grunted.

So we got up and met the gang. If it weren't that I had Connie with me they would have treated me like another character, too. Just for a minute, maybe, then a few fat guts would have been bounced off the walls. There was Joseph, Andrew, Homer, Martin and Raymond and not a nickname in the pack. They all had soft hands, big diamonds, loud laughs, fat wallets and lovely women. That is, all except Homer. He had his secretary along, who wasn't as pretty as she was ready, willing and able. She was his mistress and made no bones about it.

I liked her best. So did Connie.

When I squeezed their hands until they hurt we sat down and had a few drinks and dirty jokes, then Andrew got loud about bigger and better times elsewhere. The rest threw in with him and we picked up our marbles and left. Martin gave the waiter a ten-spot he didn't deserve and he showed us to the door.

Connie didn't know the way so we just followed. The girls did all the steering. Twice we had to step around drunks and once we moved into the gutter to get out of the way of a street brawl. They should have stayed in the gutter where they belonged. I was so hopping mad I could hardly speak and Connie rubbed her cheek against my shoulder in sympathy.

The Bowery Inn was off the main line. It was a squalid place with half-boarded-up windows, fly-specked beer-signs and an outward appearance of something long ago gone to seed.

That was from the outside. The first thing you noticed when you went in was the smell. It wasn't. It smelled like a bar should smell. The tables and the bar were as deliberately aged with worm holes and cigarette burns as the characters were phoney. Maybe the others couldn't see it, but I could.

Connie grimaced, 'So this is The Inn I've heard so much about.'

I could hardly hear her over the racket. Everybody was running forward to greet everybody else and the dames sounded like a bunch of pigs at a trough. The fat bellies stood back and beamed. When the racket eased off to a steady clamour everybody checked their coats and hats with a one-eyed bag behind a booth, who had a spittoon on the counter to collect the tips.

While Connie was helloing a couple of gaunt things from her office I sidled over to the bar for a shot and a beer. I needed it bad. Besides, it gave me a chance to look around. Down at the back of the room was a narrow single door that hung from one hinge and had a calendar tacked to it that flapped every time it opened.

It flapped pretty often because there was an unending stream of traffic coming and going through that door and the only characters inside there had on evening gowns and tuxes with all the spangles.

Connie looked around for me, saw me spilling down the chaser and walked over. 'This is only the front, Mike. Let's go in where the fun is. That's what they say, anyway.'

'Roger, baby, I need fun pretty bad.'

I took her arm and joined the tail-end of the procession that was heading for the door on one hinge and the calendar.

We had quite a surprise. Quite a surprise! The calendar door was only the first. It led into a room with warped walls and had to close before the other door would open. The one hinge was only a phony. There were two on the inside frame nicely concealed. The room was a soundproof connexion between the back room and the bar and it was some joint, believe me.

Plenty of thousands went into the making of the place and there were plenty of thousands in the wallets that sat at the fancy chrome-trimmed bar or in the plush-lined seats along the wall. The lights were down low and a spot was centred on a completely naked woman doing a striptease in reverse. It was nothing when she was bare, but it was something to watch her get dressed. When she finished she stepped out of the spot and sat down next to a skinny bald-headed gent who was in one hell of a dither having a dame alongside him he had just seen in the raw. The guy called for champagne.

Now I saw why the place was a popular hangout. The walls

were solid blocks of photographs, models by the hundreds in every stage of dress and undress. Some were originals, some were cut from magazines. All were signed with some kind of love to a guy named Clyde.

Connie and I tipped our glasses together and I let my eyes drift to the pictures. 'You up there?'

'Could be. Want to look around?'

'No. I like you better sitting where I can see you personally.'

A band came out and took their places behind the stand. Homer excused himself and came around the table to Connie and asked her to dance. That left me playing knees with his mistress until she looked at the floor anxiously and practically asked me to take her out there.

I'm not much for dancing, but she made up for it. She danced close enough to almost get behind me and had a hell of an annoying habit of sticking her tongue out to touch the tip of my ear. Homer did all right for himself.

It took an hour for the party to get going good. At eleven-thirty the place was jammed to the rafters and a guy couldn't hear himself think. Andrew started talking about spending money again and one of the girls squalled that there was plenty of it to throw away if the boys wanted some sporting propositions. One of them got up and consulted with a waiter, who came back in a minute and mumbled a few words and nodded towards a curtained alcove to one side.

I said, 'Here we go, kid.'

Connie screwed up her face. 'I don't get it, Mike.'

'Hell, it's the same old fix. They got gambling tables in the back room. They give you the old peephole routine to make it look good.'

'Really?'

'You'll see.'

Everybody got up and started off in the direction of the curtain. The pitch was coming in fast now. I began to think of Chester Wheeler again, wondering if he made this same trip. He had needed five grand. Why? To play or to pay off? A guy could run up some heavy sugar in debts on a wheel. Suicide? Why kill yourself for five grand? Why pay off at all? A word to the right cop and they'd tear this place down and you could forget the debts.

One of the girls happened to look over her shoulder and screamed, 'Oh, there's Clyde! Hello, Clyde! Clyde . . . hello!'

The lean guy in the tux turned his cold smile on her and waved back, then finished making his rounds of the tables. I felt my mouth pulling into a nasty grin and I told Connie to go ahead.

I walked over to Clyde.

'If it ain't my old pal Dinky,' I said.

Clyde was bent over a table and the stiffness ran through his back, and he didn't stop talking until he was damned good and ready. I stuck a Lucky between my lips and fired it just as the lights went down and the spot lit up another lewd nude prancing on the stage.

Then Clyde swung his fish eyes on me. 'What are you doing here, shamus?'

'I was thinking the same thing about you.'

'You've been here too long already. Get out!' The stiffness was still in his back. He threaded through the tables, a quick smile for someone here and there. When he reached the bar a bottle was set up in front of him and he poured himself a quick shot.

I blew a stream of smoke in his face. 'Nice layout.'

His eyes were glassy with hate now. 'Maybe you didn't hear me right.'

'I heard you, only I'm not one of your boys to jump when you speak, Dink.'

'What do you want?'

I blew some more smoke at him and he pulled out of the way. 'I want to satisfy my curiosity, Dink. Yeah, that's what I want to do. The last time I saw you was in a courtroom taking the oath from a wheel-chair. You had a bullet in your leg. I put it there, remember? You swore that you weren't the guy who drove a getaway car for a killer, but the bullet in your leg made you out a liar. You did a stretch for that. Remember now?'

He didn't answer me.

'You sure came a long way, kid. No more wheel spots for you. Maybe now you do the killing?'

His upper lip curled over his teeth. 'The papers say you don't carry a gun any more, Hammer. That's not so good for you. Keep out of my way.'

He went to raise his drink to his mouth, but I swatted his elbow and the stuff splattered into his face. His face went livid. 'Take it easy, Dink. Don't let the cops spot you. I'll take a look around before I go.'

My old friend Dinky Williams, who called himself Clyde, was reaching for the house phone on the end of the bar when I left.

To cross the room I had to walk around behind the spot and it took me a minute to find the curtain in the semi-darkness. There was another door behind the curtain. It was locked. I rapped on the panel and the inevitable peephole opened that showed a pair of eyes over a nose that had a scar down the centre.

At first I thought I wasn't going to get in, then the lock clicked and the door swung in just a little.

Sometimes you get just enough warning. Some reflex action shoves you out of the way before you can get your head split open. My hand went up in time to form a cushion for my skull and something smashed down on my knuckles that brought a bubbling yell up out of my throat.

I kept on going, dove and rolled so that I was on my back with my feet up and staring at the ugly face of an oversize pug who had a billy raised ready to use. He didn't go for the feet, but he didn't think fast enough to catch me while I was down.

I'm no cat, but I got my shoes under me in a hurry. The billy swung at my head while I was still off balance. The guy was too eager. He missed me. I didn't miss. I was big, he was bigger. I had one bad hand and I didn't want to spoil the other. I leaned back against the wall and kicked out and up with a slashing toe that nearly tore him in half. He tried to scream. All I heard was a bubbling sound. The billy hit the floor and he doubled over, hands clawing at his groin. This time I measured it right. I took a short half-step and kicked his face in.

I looked at the billy, picked it up and weighed it. The thing was made for murder. It was too bulky in my pocket so I dropped it in the empty shoulder holster under my arm and grunted at the guy on the floor who was squirming unconsciously in his own blood.

The room was another of those rooms between rooms. A chair was tilted against the wall beside the door, the edge of it biting into the soundproofing. Just for kicks I dragged the stupe over to the chair, propped him in it and tilted it back against the wall again. His head was down and you could hardly see the blood. A lot could go on before he'd know about it, I thought.

When I was satisfied with the arrangement I snapped the lock off the door to accommodate the customers and tried the other door into the back room. This one was open.

The lights hit me so hard after the semi-darkness of the hall that I didn't see Connie come over. She said, 'Where've you been, Mike?'

Her hand hooked in my arm and I gave it an easy squeeze. 'I got friends here, too.'

'Who?'

'Oh, some people you don't know.'

She saw the blood on the back of my hand then, the skin of the knuckles peeled back. Her face went a little white. 'Mike ... what did you do?'

I grinned at her. 'Caught it on something.'

She asked another question, one I didn't hear. I was too busy taking in the layout of the place. It was a gold mine. Over the babble you could hear the click and whirr of the roulette wheels, the excited shrieks when they stopped. There were tables for dice, faro spreads, bird cages and all the games and gadgets that could make a guy want to rip a bill off his roll and try his luck.

The place was done up like an old-fashioned Western gambling hall, with gaudy murals on every wall. The overhead lights were fashioned from cartwheels and oxen yokes, the hanging brass lanterns almost invisible in the glare of the bright lights inside them. Along one wall was a fifty-foot bar of solid mahogany complete with brass rail, never-used cuspids and plate-glass mirrors with real bullet holes.

If ever I had a desire to be surrounded by beauty, I would have found it there. Beauty was commonplace. It was professional. Beauty was there under a lot of make-up and too much skin showing. Beauty was there in models who showed off what they liked to advertise best. It was like looking into the dressing-room of the Follies. There was so much of it you tried to see it all at once and lost out with your hurry.

It was incredible as hell.

I shook my head. Connie smiled, 'Hard to believe, isn't it?'

That was an understatement. 'What's the pitch?'

'I told you, Mike. It's a fad. It caught on and spread like the pox. Pretty soon it'll get around, the place will be jammed and jumpin', then the whole deal will get boring.'

'So they'll move on to something else.'

'Exactly. Right now it's almost a club. They're fawned over and fought over. They make a big splash. Wait till it all catches up with them.'

'And all this in the Bowery. Right in the middle of the Bowery! Pat would give his right arm for a peep at this. Maybe I'll let him give me a left arm too.'

I stopped and peered around again. Beauty. It was starting to get flat now. There were too many big bellies and bald heads in the way. They spoiled the picture. I spotted Homer and Andrew in the crowd having a big time at the crap table. Evidently Homer was winning because his babe was stuffing the chips he handed her into a bag that wouldn't take too many. The ones she had left over got tied up in her handkerchief.

We made a complete tour of the place before fixing on a leather-covered corner-spot to watch the shindig and drink at the same time. A waiter in a cowboy outfit brought a

highballs and crackers and said it was on the house. As soon as he left Connie asked, 'What do you think, Mike?'

'I don't know, sugar. I'm wondering if my pal would have gone for this.'

'Wasn't he like the rest?'

'You mean, was he a man?'

'Sort of.'

'Hell, he probably would. What guy wouldn't take in a hot spot with a babe. He's alone in the city, no chaperon and bored stiff. His work is done for the day and he needs a little relaxation. We'll leave it at that. If he did get persuaded to come it didn't take much persuasion.'

I lit a cigarette and picked up my drink. I had a long swallow and was following it with a drag on the butt when the crowd split apart for a second to let a waiter through and I had a clear view of the bar.

Juno was sitting there laughing at something Anton Lipsek just said.

The ice started to rattle against my glass and I had that feeling up my spine again. I said to Connie, 'Get lost for a little while, will you?'

'She's truly beautiful, isn't she, Mike?'

I blushed for the first time since I wore long pants. 'She's different. She makes most of them look sick.'

'Me, too?'

'I haven't seen her with her clothes off. Until then, you're the best.'

'Don't lie, Mike.' Her eyes were laughing at me.

I stood up and grinned back at her. 'Just in case you really want to know, she's the best-looking thing I ever saw. I get steamed up watching her from fifty feet away. Whatever a dame's supposed to have on the ball, she's got it. My tongue feels an inch thick when I talk to her and if she asked me to jump I'd say, "How high?" and if she asked me to poop I'd say, "How much?". But here's something you can tuck away if it means anything to you. I don't like her and I don't know why I don't.'

Connie reached over and took a cigarette from my pack. When it was lit she said, 'It means plenty to me. I'll get lost, Mike. But just for a little while.'

I patted her hand and walked over to where the queen of the gods and goddesses was holding court. When she saw me her smile made sunshine and the funny feeling started around my stomach.

She held out her hand and I took it. 'Mike, what are you doing here?'

Juno guided me to a stool on Olympus, letting go my hand

almost reluctantly. More eyes than Anton Lipsek's watched me enviously. 'I was side-tracked into a flirtation when I left your office.'

Anton wiggled his beard with an 'Ah, hah!' He caught on fast.

'I guess it pays to be physical,' Juno smiled. Her eyes drifted over the crowd. 'There aren't many men here who are. You're rather an attraction.'

So was she. You might say she was overclothed by comparison, but not overdressed. The front of the black gown came up to her neck and the sleeves came down to meet her gloves. The width of her shoulders, the regal taper of her waist was sheathed in a shimmering silk that reflected the lights and clung tenaciously to her body. Her breasts rose full and high under the gown, moving gently with her breathing.

'Drink?'

I nodded. The music of her voice brought the bartender to life and he put a highball in front of me. Anton joined us in a toast, then excused himself and walked over to the roulette wheel. I deliberately swung around on the stool, hoping she'd follow me so I could have her to myself.

She did, smiling at me in the mirrors that had the bullet holes.

'I have news for you, Mike. Perhaps I should let it keep so I could see you again tomorrow.'

My hand started to tighten around the glass. One of the bullet holes was in the way so I turned my head to look at her. 'The girl . . .'

'Yes. I found her.'

Ever have your inside squeeze up into a knot so hard you thought you'd turn inside out? I did. 'Go on,' I said.

'Her name is Marion Lester. I presume you'll want to see her yourself, of course. Her address is the Chadwick Hotel. She was the third one I spoke to this afternoon and she readily admitted what had happened, although she seemed a little frightened when I told her the full story.'

'All right, all right, what did she say?' I took a quick drink and pushed the glass across the bar.

'Actually . . . nothing. Your friend *did* help her into a cab and he saw her home. In fact, he carried her upstairs and tucked her into bed with her clothes on, shoes and all. It seems as if he was quite a gentleman.'

'Damn,' I said, 'damn it all to hell anyway!'

Juno's fingers found mine on the bar rail and her smile was replaced by intense concern. 'Mike, please! It can't be that bad. Aren't you glad it was that way?'

I cursed under my breath, something nice and nasty I had-

to get out. 'I guess so. It's just that it leaves me climbing a tree again. Thanks anyway, Juno.'

She leaned towards me and my head filled with the fragrance of a perfume that made me dizzy. She had grey eyes. Deep grey eyes. Deep and compassionate. Eyes that could talk by themselves. 'Will you come up tomorrow anyway?'

I couldn't have said no. I didn't want to. I nodded and my lip worked into a snarl I couldn't control. Even my hands tightened into fists until the broken skin over my knuckles began to sting. 'I'll be there,' I said. I got that funny feeling again. I couldn't figure it, damn it, I didn't know what it was.

A finger tapped my shoulder and Connie said, 'I'm losted, Mike. Hello, Juno.'

Olympus smiled another dawn.

Connie said, 'Can we go home now?'

I slid off the stool and looked at the goddess. This time we didn't shake hands. Just meeting her eyes was enough. 'Good night, Juno.'

'Good night, Mike.'

Anton Lipsek came back and nodded to the both of us. I took Connie's arm and steered her towards the door. Joseph, Andrew, Martin, Homer and Raymond all yelled for us to join the party then shut up when they saw the look on my face. One of them muttered, 'Sour sort of fellow, isn't he?'

The joker with the bashed-in face wasn't in his chair where I had left him. Two other guys were holding the fort and I knew what they were doing there. They were waiting for me. The tall skinny one was a goon I knew and who knew me and licked his lips. The other one was brand, spanking new. About twenty-two maybe.

They looked at Connie, wondering how to get her out of there so she wouldn't be a witness to what came next. The goon I knew licked his lips again and rubbed his hands together. 'We been waiting for you, Hammer.'

The kid put on more of an act. He screwed up his pimply face to make a sneer, pushing himself away from the wall trying to make shoulders under his dinner jacket. 'So you're Mike Hammer, are ya? Ya don't look so tough to me, guy.'

I let my hand fool with the buttons on my coat. The billy in the empty holster pushed against the fabric under my arm and looked real as hell. 'There's always one way you can find out, sonny,' I said.

When the kid licked his lips a little spit ran down his chin. Connie walked ahead of me and opened the door. I walked past the two of them and they never moved. In a little while they'd be out of a job.

Not an empty table showed in this first back room. The

show was over and the tiny dance floor was packed to the limit. The late tourist crowd was having itself a fling and making no bones about it. I scanned the sea of heads looking for Clyde. It was a hell of a change from Dinky Williams. But he wasn't around. We picked up our stuff from the hag at the check-room and I tossed a dime in the spittoon. She swore and I swore back at her.

The words we used weren't unusual for the front section of the Bowery Inn, and no heads turned except two at the bar. One was Clyde's. I waved my thumb towards the back. 'Lousy help you hire, Dink.' His face was livid again.

I didn't even look at the babe. It was Velda.

CHAPTER FIVE

I WAS sitting in the big leather chair in the office when Velda put her key in the lock. She had on a tailored suit that made her look like a million dollars. Her long black page-boy hair threw back the light of the morning sunshine that streamed through the window and it struck me that of all the beauty in the world I had the best of it right under my nose.

She saw me then and said, 'I thought you'd be here.' There was frost in her voice. She tossed her handbag on the desk and sat in my old chair. Hell, it was her joint now anyway.

'You move pretty fast, Velda.'

'So do you.'

'Referring to my company of last night, I take it.'

'Exactly. Your legwork. They were very nice, just your type.'

I grinned at her. 'I wish I could say something decent about your escort.'

The frost melted and her voice turned soft. 'I'm the jealous type, Mike.'

I didn't have to lean far to reach her. The chair was on casters that moved easily. I wound my fingers in her hair, started to say something and stopped. Instead, I kissed the tip of her nose. Her fingers tightened around my wrist. She had her eyes half-closed and didn't see me push her handbag out of reach. It tipped with the weight of the gun in it and landed on the floor.

This time I kissed her mouth. It was a soft, warm mouth. It was a light kiss, but I'll never forget it. It left me wanting to wrap my arms around her and squeeze until she couldn't move. No, I didn't do that. I slid back into my chair and Velda said, 'It was never like that before, Mike. Don't treat me like the others.'

My hand was shaking when I tried to light another cigarette. 'I didn't expect to find you down the Bowery last night, kid.'

'You told me to get to work, Mike.'

'Finish it. Let's hear it all.'

Velda leaned back in the chair, her eyes on mine. 'You said to concentrate on Wheeler. I did. The papers carried most of the details and there was nothing to be learned here. I hopped the first plane to Columbus, visited with his family and business associates and got the next plane back again.'

She picked her handbag off the floor and extracted a small black loose-leaf pad, flipping the cover back to the first page. 'Here is the essence of what I learned. Everyone agreed that Chester Wheeler was an energetic, conscientious husband, father and business man. There has never been any family trouble. Whenever he was away he wrote or called home frequently. This time they had two picture postcards from him, a letter and one phone call. He phoned as soon as he arrived in New York to tell them he'd had a successful trip. He sent one card to his son, a plain penny postcard. The next card was post-marked from the Bowery and he mentioned going to a place called the Bowery Inn. Then he wrote a letter to his wife that was quite commonplace. A postscript to his twenty-two-year-old daughter mentioned the fact that he had met an old high-school friend of hers working in the city. That was the last they heard until they were notified of his death.'

'When I dug up his business friends I got nowhere. His business was fine, he was making a lot of money, and he had no worries at all.'

I clamped my teeth together. 'Like hell you got nowhere,' I said softly. My mind drifted back over that little conversation with Pat. A little talk about how a guy named Emil Perry said Wheeler had been depressed because business was rotten. 'You're sure about his business?'

'Yes. I checked his credit rating.'

'Nice going. Continue.'

'Well . . . the only lead I saw was this place called the Bowery Inn. I did some fast quizzing when I got home and found out what it was all about. The man who runs the place you seemed to know. I put on an act and he fell for it. Hard. He didn't seem to like you much, Mike.'

'I can't blame him. I shot him once.'

'After you left he couldn't talk for five minutes. He excused himself and went into the back room. When he returned he seemed satisfied about something. There was blood on his hands.'

That would be Dinky, all right. He liked to use his hands when he had a couple of rods backing him up. 'That all?'

'Practically. He wants to see me again.'

I felt the cords in my neck pull tight. 'The bastard! I'll beat the pants off him for that!'

Velda shook her head and laughed. 'Don't you get to be the jealous type too, Mike. You don't wear it so well. Is it important that I see him again?'

I agreed reluctantly. 'It's important.'

'Is it still murder?'

'More than ever, sugar. I bet it's a big murder, too. A great big beautiful murder with all the trimmings.'

'Then what do you suggest I do next?'

I gave it a thought first, then looked at her a moment. 'Play this Clyde. Keep your eyes open and see what happens. If I were you I'd hide that P.I. ticket and leave the gun home. We don't want him putting two and two together and getting a bee in his bonnet.'

'If you follow me on this you'll see the connexion. First we have Wheeler. We have the fact that he *might* have taken a model out that night and he *might* have gone to the Inn where he *might* have run into something that meant murder. If Clyde didn't enter into this I'd skip the whole premise, but he makes it too interesting to pass up.'

'There's only one hitch. Juno found the girl he left with the night of the party. She didn't go out with him!'

'But, Mike, then . . .'

'Then I'm supposing he *might* have gone with somebody else some other time. Hell of a lot of mights in this. Too many. At least it's something to work on, and if you stick around this Clyde character long enough something will turn up one way or another.'

Velda rose, her legs spread apart, throwing out her arms in a stretch that made her jacket and skirt fill up almost to bursting. I had to bend my head down into a match to get my eyes off her. Clyde was going to get a hell of a deal for his money. I slapped my hat on and opened the door for her.

When we reached the street I put her in a taxi and watched until she was around the corner. It was just nine-thirty, so I headed for the nearest phone-booth, dropped a nickel in the slot and dialled police headquarters. Pat had checked in, but he couldn't be located at present. I told the switchboard operator to have him meet me in a spaghetti joint around the corner from headquarters in a half-hour and the guy said he'd pass the message on. I found my heap and climbed in. It was going to be a busy day.

Pat was waiting for me over a half-finished eup of coffee. When he saw me come in he signalled for another coffee and some pastry. I threw my leg over the chair and sat down. 'Morning, officer. How's every little thing in the department?'

'Going smoothly, Mike.'

'Oh, too bad.'

He set his coffee eup down again. His face was absolutely blank. 'Don't start anything, Mike.'

I acted indignant. 'Who, me? What could I start that's not already started?'

The waiter brought my coffee and some Danish and I

dunked and ate two of them before either of us spoke again. Curiosity got the best of Pat. He said, 'Let's hear it, Mike.'

'Are you going to be stupid about it, Pat?'

His face was still frozen. 'Let's hear it, Mike.'

I didn't make any bones about trying to keep it out of my eyes or the set of my jaw. My voice came up from my chest with a nasty rumble and I could feel my lip working into a snarl that pulled the corners of my mouth down.

'You're a smart cop, Pat. Everybody knows it, but most of all I know it and you know it yourself. You know something else besides. I'm just as smart. I said Wheeler was murdered and you patted me on the head and told me to behave.'

'I'm saying it again, Pat. Wheeler was murdered. You can get in this thing or I can do it alone. I told you I wanted the ticket back and I'm going to get it. If I do, a lot of reputations are going to fall by the wayside including yours and I don't want that to happen.'

'You know me and you know I don't get around here beginning to get ideas, Pat. They think good. I've seen some things that look good. Things that you were made to see the flavour of murder. I'm going to have the answer later on, long and a certain D.A. is going to get the same thing out of him.'

I don't know what I expected Pat to do. I expected him to blow his top or start vomiting or to have a seizure in the brain department. I certainly didn't expect to see him that cold and hear him say, 'I gave you the ticket back a long time ago, Mike. I think Wheeler was murdered.'

He grinned a little at my expression and then he said, 'That's a catch. Word reached the D.A. and he told me to call you. I passed his professional opinion to you. You're the Medical Examiner. Wheeler was murdered. I've been told to concentrate on the details. Mean-while you can look into the details of the former torpedo.'ments in the wide field of the world.

'Our boy doesn't like you, Mike.'

'Ha!'

'So?'

'What do you know, Mike?'

'Just a little. I've been in your lap for a long time and I don't suppose you've ever told me anything about the details of the former torpedo.'

'It went up to the top of the world, Mike.'

'Good! Tell me the details. Mean-while you can look into the details of the former torpedo. I know him.'

'Yeah?'

'We had him on an assault and battery charge a while back. The complainant failed to complain and he was dismissed. He called himself a fight promoter.'

'Street brawls,' I said sourly.

'Probably. He was loaded with jack, but he had a room in the Bowery.'

'Where, Pat?' My eyes lit up and Pat went grim.

'The Bowery. Why?'

'Interesting word. I've been hearing a lot about it these days. See if you can get a line on him, will you?'

Pat tapped a cigarette on the table. 'This is all on the table, isn't it?'

'Every bit of it, chum. I won't hold back. I'm curious about one thing, though. What changed your mind from suicide to murder?'

Pat grinned through his teeth. 'You. I didn't think you'd chase shadows. I said I wouldn't get excited this time, but I couldn't help myself. By the time I reached the office I was shaking like a punk in his first hold-up and I went down to take a look at the body. I called in a couple of experts and though there were few marks on the body it was the general opinion that our lad Wheeler had been through some sort of a scuffle prior to taking a bullet in the head.'

'It couldn't have been much of a fuss. He was pretty damn drunk.'

'It wasn't,' he said, 'just enough to leave indications. By the way, Mike . . . about that slug and shell we found in the hall. Was that your work?'

I let out a short, sour laugh. 'I told you that once. No. Somebody had a hole in his pocket.'

He nodded thoughtfully. 'I'll check the hotel again. It had to be either a resident or a visitor, then. It's too bad you didn't lock the door.'

'A lock won't stop a killer,' I said. 'He had all the time in the world and could make as much noise as he wanted. Most of the guests were either half-deaf or dead to the world when the gun went off. It's an old building with thick walls that do a nice job of muffling sound.'

Pat picked up the cheque and laid a dollar on top of it. 'You'll contact me tonight then?'

'You bet! See you later and tell the D.A. I was asking for him.'

It took fifteen minutes to get to the Chadwick Hotel. It was another side-street affair with an essence of dignity that stopped as soon as you entered the lobby. The desk clerk was the Mom type until she spoke, then what came out made you

think of other things. I told her I wanted to see a certain Marion Lester and she didn't bother to question or announce me. She said, 'Room 312 and go up the stairs easy. They squeak.'

I went up the stairs easy and they squeaked anyway. I knocked on the door of 312, waited and knocked again. The third time I heard feet shuffling across the floor and the door opened just far enough to show wide blue eyes, hair curlers and a satin negligée clutched tightly at the throat. I jumped the gun before she could ask questions with 'Hello, Marion Juno told me to see you.'

The wide eyes got wider and the door opened the rest of the way. I closed it behind me and made like a gentleman by sweeping off my hat. Marion licked her lips and cleared her throat. 'I . . . just got up.'

'So I see. Rough night?'

'... No.'

She took me through the miniature hall into a more miniature living-room and waved for me to sit down. I sat. She said, 'It's so early . . . if you don't mind, I'll get dressed.'

I told her I didn't mind and she shuffled into the bedroom and began pulling drawers out and opening closets. She wasn't like the other girls I knew. She was back in five minutes. This time she had a suit on and the curlers were out of her hair. A little make-up and her eyes didn't look so wide either.

She sat down gracefully in a straight-backed chair and reached for a cigarette in a silver box. 'Now, what did you want to see me about, Mr . . .'

'Mike Hammer. Just plain Mike.' I snapped a match on my thumbnail and held it out to her. 'Did Juno tell you about me?'

Marion nodded, twin streams of smoke sifting out through her nostrils. Her voice had a tremor in it and she licked her lips again. 'Yes. You . . . were with Mr Wheeler when he . . . he died.'

'That's right. It happened under my nose and I was too drunk to know it.'

'I'm afraid there's little I can . . . tell you, Mike.'

'Tell me about that night. That's enough.'

'Didn't Juno tell you?'

'Yeah, but I want to hear you say it.'

She took a deep drag on the butt and squashed it in a tray. 'He took me home. I had a few too many drinks, and . . . well, I was feeling a little giddy. I think he rode around in a cab with me for a while. Really, I can't remember everything exactly . . .'

'Go on.'

'I must have passed out, because the next thing I knew I

woke up in my bed fully clothed and with an awful hangover. Later I learned that he had committed suicide, and frankly, I was very much upset.'

'And that's all?'

'That's all.'

It's too bad, I thought. She's the type to show a guy a time if she wanted to. It was just too damn bad. She waited to see what I'd say next, and since it was still early I asked, 'Tell me about it from the beginning. The show and all, I mean.'

Marion smoothed out her hair with the flat of her hand and looked up at the ceiling. 'The Calway Merchandising Company made the booking through Miss Reeves . . . Juno. She . . .'

'Does Juno always handle those details?'

'No, not always. Sometimes they go through Anton. You see, Juno is really the important one. She makes all the contacts and is persuasive enough to throw quite a few accounts to the agency.'

'I can see why,' I admitted with a grin.

She smiled back. 'Our agency is perhaps the most exclusive in town. The models get paid more, are more in demand than any others, and all through Miss Reeves. A call from her is equal to a call from the biggest movie studio. In fact, she's managed to promote several of the agency models right into pictures.'

'But to get back to the show . . . ' I prompted.

'Yes . . . the call came in and Juno notified us at once. We had to report to Calway Merchandising to pick up the dresses we had to show and be fitted. That took better than two hours. One of the managers took us to the dinner where we sat through the speeches and what have you, and about an hour beforehand we left to get dressed. The show lasted for fifteen minutes or so: we changed back to our street clothes and joined the crowd. By that time drinks were being served and I managed to have a couple too many.'

'About meeting Wheeler, how'd you manage that?'

'I think it was when I left. I couldn't make the elevator any too well. We got on together and he helped me down and into a cab. I told you the rest.'

There it was again. Nothing.

I pushed myself out of the chair and fiddled with my hat. 'Thanks, kid. That cooks it for me, but thanks anyway. You can go back to bed now.'

'I'm sorry I couldn't help you '

'Oh, it helps a little. At least I know what not to look for. Maybe I'll be seeing you around.'

She walked ahead of me to the door and held it open. 'Perhaps,' she said. 'I hope the next time is under more pleasant

circumstances.' We shook hands briefly and her forehead wrinkled. 'Incidentally, Juno mentioned reporters. I hope ...'

'They can't make anything out of it as long as things stand that way. You can practically forget about it.'

'I feel better now. Goodbye, Mr Hammer.'

'So long, kid. See ya.'

I crouched behind the wheel of my car and made faces at the traffic coming against me. It was a mess to start with and got messier all the time. Murder doesn't just happen. Not the kind of murder that gets tucked away so nicely not a single loose end stuck out.

Damn it anyway, where *was* a loose end? There had to be one! Was it money? Revenge? Passion? Why in hell did a nice guy like Wheeler have to die? Stinking little rats like Clyde ran around and did what they damn well pleased and a nice guy had to die!

I was still tossing it around in my mind when I parked along that residential street in the Bronx. The big sedan was in the driveway and I could make out the E.P. in gold Old English script on the door. I pulled the key out of the ignition and walked up the flagstone path that wound through the bushes.

This time I lifted the embossed knocker and let it drop.

A maid in a black-and-white uniform opened the door and stood with her hand on the knob. 'Good morning. Can I help you?'

'I want to see Mr Perry,' I said.

'Mr Perry left orders that he is not to be disturbed. I'm sorry, sir.'

'You go tell Mr Perry that he's gonna get disturbed right now. You tell him Mike Hammer is here and whatever a guy named Rainey can do I can do better.' I grabbed the handle and pushed the door and she didn't try to stop me at all when she saw my face. 'You go tell him that.'

I didn't have long to wait. She came back, said, 'Mr Perry will see you in his study, sir,' waved her hand towards the far end of the hall and stood there wondering what it was all about as I walked past.

Mr Perry was the scared fat man. Now he was really scared. He didn't sit—he occupied a huge leather chair behind a desk and quivered from his jowls down. He must have been at peace with himself a minute before because an opened book lay face-down and a cigar burned in an ash tray.

I threw my hat on the desk, cleared away some of the fancy junk that littered it and sat on the edge. 'You're a liar, Perry,' I said.

The fat man's mouth dropped open and the first chin under it started to tremble. His pudgy little fingers squeezed the arms of his chair trying to get juice out of it. He didn't have much voice left when he said, 'How dare you to . . . in my own home! How dare you . . .'

I shook a butt out of the pack and jammed it in the corner of my mouth. I didn't have a match so I lit it from his cigar. 'What did Rainey promise you, Perry—a beating?' I glanced at him through the smoke. 'A slug in the back, maybe?'

His eyes went from the window to the door. 'What are you . . .'

I finished it for him. 'I'm talking about a hood named Rainey. What did he promise you?'

Perry's voice faded altogether and he looked slightly sick. I said, 'I'll tell you once then I want an answer. I told you whatever Rainey can do I can do better. I can beat the hell out of you worse. I can put a slug where it'll hurt more and I'll get a large charge out of it besides.'

'I'm talking about a guy you said you knew. His name was Wheeler, Chester Wheeler. He was found dead in a hotel room and the verdict was suicide. You informed the police that he was despondent . . . about business, you said.'

Emil Perry gave a pathetic little nod and flicked his tongue over his lips. I leaned forward so I could spit the words in his face. 'You're a damned liar, Perry. There was nothing the matter with Wheeler's business. It was a stall, wasn't it?'

The fear crept into his eyes and he tried to shake his head.

'Do you know what happened to Wheeler?' I spoke the words only inches away from him. 'Wheeler was murdered. And you know something else . . . you're going to be in line for the same thing when the killer knows I'm on your tail. He won't trust your not talking and you, my fat friend, will get a nice nasty slug imbedded somewhere in your intestines.'

Emil Perry's eyes were like coals in a snowbank. He held his breath until his chin quivered, his cheeks went blue and he passed out. I sat back on the edge of the desk and finished my cigarette, waiting for him to come around.

It took a good five minutes and he resembled a lump of clay someone had piled in the chair. A lump of clay in a business suit.

When his eyes opened he made a pass at a perspiring decanter on the desk. I poured out a glass of ice water and handed it to him. He made loud gulping sounds getting it down.

I let my voice go flat. 'You didn't even know Wheeler, did you?'

His expression gave me the answer to that one.

'Want to talk about it?'

Perry managed a fast negative movement of his head. I got up and put my hat on and walked to the door. Before I opened it I looked back over my shoulder. 'You're supposed to be a solid citizen, fat boy. The cops take your word for things. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going out and find what it is that Rainey promised you and really lay it on.'

His face turned blue and he passed out before I closed the door. The hell with him. He could get his own water this time.

CHAPTER SIX

THE sky had clouded over, putting a bite in the air. Here and there a car coming in from out of town was wearing a top hat of snow. I pulled in to a corner restaurant and had two cups of coffee to get the chill out of my bones, then climbed back in the car and cut across town to my apartment, where I picked up my topcoat and gloves. By the time I reached the street there were grey feathers of snow in the air slanting down through the sheer walls of the buildings to the street.

It was twelve-fifteen before I found a parking lot with room to rent. As soon as I checked my keys in the shack I grabbed a cab and gave the driver the address of the Anton Lipsek Agency on Thirty-third Street. Maybe something could be salvaged from the day after all.

This time the sweet-looking receptionist with the sour smile didn't ask questions. I told her, 'Miss Reeves, please,' and she spoke into the intercom box. The voice that came back was low and vibrant, tinged with an overtone of pleasure. I didn't have to be told that she was waiting for me.

The gods on Olympus could well be proud of their queen. She was a vision of perfection in a long-sleeved dress striding across the room to meet me. The damn clothes she wore. They covered everything up and let your imagination fill in the blanks. The sample she offered was her hands and face, but the sample was enough because it made you want to undress her with your eyes and feel the warm flesh of a goddess. There was a lilt to her walk and a devil in her eyes as we shook hands, a brief touch that sent my skin crawling up my spine again.

'I'm so glad you came, Mike.'

'I told you I would.' The dress buttoned up snug at the neck and she wore but one piece of jewellery, a pendant. I flipped it into the light and it threw back a shimmering green glow. I let out a whistle. The thing was an emerald that must have cost a fortune.

'Like it?'

'Some rock.'

'I love beautiful things,' she said.

'So do I.' Juno turned her head and a pleased smile flashed at me for a second and disappeared. The devils in her eyes laughed their pleasure, too, and she walked to her desk.

That was when the grey light from the window seeped into the softness of her hair and turned it a gold that made my heart beat against my chest until I thought it would come loose.

There was a bad taste in my mouth.

My guts were all knotted up in a ball and that damnable music began in my head. Now I knew what that creepy feeling was that left my spine tingling. Now I knew what it was about Juno that made me want to reach out and grab her.

She reminded me of another girl.

A girl that happened a long time ago.

A girl I thought I had put out of my mind and forgotten completely in a wild hatred that could never be equalled. She was blonde, a very yellow, golden blonde. She was dead and I made her that way. I killed her because I wanted to and she wouldn't stay dead.

I looked down at my hands and they were shaking violently, the fingers stiffened into talons that showed every vein and tendon.

'Mike . . . ?' The voice was different. It was Juno and now that I knew what it was I could stop shaking. The gold was out of her hair.

She brought her coat over to me to hold while she slipped into it. There was a little piece of mink fur on her hat that matched the coat. 'We are going to lunch, aren't we?'

'I'm not here on business.'

She laughed again and leaned against me as she worked the gloves over her fingers. 'What were you thinking of a minute ago, Mike?'

I didn't let her see my face. 'Nothing.'

'You aren't telling the truth.'

'I know it.'

Juno looked at me over her shoulder. There was a pleading in her eyes. 'It wasn't me . . . something I did?'

I forced a lopsided smile. 'Nothing you did, Juno. I just happened to think of something I shouldn't have.'

'I'm glad, Mike. You were hating something then and I wouldn't want you to hate me.' She reached for my hand almost girlishly and pulled me to the door at the side of the room. 'I don't want to share you with the whole office force, Mike.'

We came out around the corner of the corridor and I punched the bell for the elevator. While we waited she squeezed my arm under hers, knowing that I couldn't help watching her. Juno, a goddess in a fur coat. She was an improvement on the original.

And in that brief second I looked at her the light filtered through her hair again and reflected the sheen of gold. My

whole head rocked with the fire and pain in my chest and I felt Charlotte's name trying to force itself past my lips. Good God! Is this what it's like to think back? Is this what happened when you remember a woman you loved then blasted into hell? I ripped my eyes away and slammed my finger against the buzzer on the wall, holding it there, staring at it until I heard metal scraping behind the doors.

The elevator stopped and the operator gave her a princely nod and a subdued murmur of greeting. The two other men in the car looked at Juno, then back to me jealously. She seemed to affect everyone the same way.

The street had taken on a slippery carpet of white that rippled under the wind. I turned up my coat collar against it and peered down the road for a cab. Juno said, 'No cab, Mike. My car's around the corner.' She fished in her pocket and brought out a gold chain that ran through two keys. 'Here, you drive.'

We ducked our heads and went around the block with the wind whipping at our legs. The car she pointed out was a new Caddy convertible with all the trimmings that I thought only existed in show windows. I held the door open while she got in, slammed it shut and ran around the other side. Stuff like this was really living

The engine was a cat's purr under the hood wanting to pull away from the kerb in a roar of power. 'Call it, Juno. Where to?'

'There's a little place downtown that I discovered a few months ago. They have the best steaks in the world if you can keep your mind on them. The most curious people in the world seem to eat there . . . almost fascinating people.'

'Fascinating?'

Her laugh was low, alive with humour. 'That isn't a good word. They're . . . well, they're most unusual. Really, I've never seen anything like it. But the food is good. Oh, you'll see. Drive down Broadway and I'll show you how to go.'

I nodded and headed towards the Stern with the windscreen wipers going like metronomes. The snow was a pain, but it thinned out traffic somewhat and it was only a matter of minutes before we were downtown. Juno leaned forward in the seat, peering ahead at the street corners. I slowed down so she could see where we were and she tipped her finger against the glass.

'Next block, Mike. It's a little place right off the corner.'

I grinned at her. 'What are we doing . . . slumming? Or is it one of those Village hangouts that have gone uptown?'

'Definitely not uptown. The food is superb.' Her eyes flashed just once as we pulled into the kerb. I grinned back and

she said, 'You act all-knowing, Mike. Have you been here before?'

'Once. It used to be a fag joint and the food was good then, too. No wonder you saw so many fascinating people.'

'Mike!'

'You ought to get around a little more, woman. You've been living too high in the clouds too long. If anybody sees me going in this joint I'm going to get whistled at. That is . . . if they let me in.'

She passed me a puzzled frown at that. 'They tossed me out one time,' I explained. 'At least they started to toss me out. The reinforcements called for reinforcements and it wound up with me walking out on my way anyway. I had my hair pulled. Nice people.'

Juno bit her lip trying to hold back a laugh. 'And here I've been telling all my friends where to go to find wonderful steaks! Come to think of it a couple of them were rather put out when I mentioned it to them a second time.'

'Hell, they probably enjoyed themselves. Come on, let's see how the third side lives.'

She shook the snow out of her hair and let me open the door for her. We had to go through the bar to the hat-check booth and I had a quick look at the gang lined up on the stools. Maybe ten eyes met mine in the mirror and tried to hang on, but I wasn't having any. There was a pansy down at the end of the bar trying to make a guy who was too drunk to notice and was about to give it up as a bad job. I got a smile from the guy and he came close to getting knocked on his neck. The bartender was one of them, too, and he looked put out because I came in with a dame.

The girl at the hat-check booth looked like she was trying hard to grow a moustache and wasn't having much luck at it. She gave me a frosty glare, but smiled at Juno and took her time about looking her over. When the babe went to hang up the coats Juno looked back at me with a little red showing in her face and I laughed at her.

'Now you know, huh?' I said.

Her hand covered the laugh. 'Oh, Mike, I feel so very foolish! And I thought they were just being friendly.'

'Oh, very friendly. To you, that is. I hope you noticed the cold treatment I got and I usually get along with any kind of dame.'

The dining-room was a long, narrow room with booths along the sides and a few tables running down the middle. Nobody was at the tables, but over half the booths were filled, if you can call two people of the same sex sitting along the same side filled. A waiter with a lisp and hair that curled around

his neck came over and curtsied then led us to the last booth back.

I ordered a round of cocktails to come in front of the steaks and the waiter gave me another curtsy that damn near had a kiss in it. Juno opened a jewelled cigarette-case and lifted out a king size. 'I think he likes you, Mike,' she said. 'Smoke?'

I shook my head and worked the next-to-last one out of my crumpled pack. Outside at the bar somebody stuck a nickel in the jukebox and managed to hit a record that didn't try to take your ears off. It was something sweet and low-down with a throaty sax carrying the melody, the kind of music that made you want to listen instead of talk. When the cocktails came we picked them up together. 'Propose a toast, Mike.'

Her eyes shone at me over the glass. 'To beauty,' I said. 'To Olympus. To a goddess that walks with the mortals.'

'With very . . . wonderful mortals,' Juno added.

We drained the glasses.

There were other cocktails and other toasts after that. The steaks came and were the best in the world like she said. There was that period when you feel full and contented and can sit back with a cigarette curling sweet smoke and look at the world and be glad you're part of it.

'Thinking, Mike?'

'Yeah, thinking how nice it is to be alive. You shouldn't have taken me here, pretty lady. It's getting my mind off my work.'

Her face knitted in a frown. 'Are you *still* looking for a reason for your friend's death?'

'Uh-huh. I checked on that Marion babe, by the way. She was the one. Everything was so darned aboveboard it knocked the props out from under me. I was afraid it would happen like that. Still trying though, still in there trying.'

'Trying?'

'Hell, yes. I don't want to wind up a grocery clerk.' She didn't get what I meant. My grin split into a smile and that into a laugh. I had no right to feel so happy, but way back in my head I knew that the sun would come up one day and show me the answer.

'What brought that on? Or are you laughing at me?'

'Not you, Juno. I couldn't laugh at you.' She stuck out her tongue at me. 'I was laughing at the way life works out. It gets pretty complicated sometimes, then all of a sudden it's as simple as hell, if hell can be simple. Like the potbellies with all the bare-backed babes in the Bowery. You know something . . . I didn't think I'd find you there.'

She shrugged her shoulders gracefully. 'Why not? A great many of your "potbellies" are wonderful business contacts.'

'I understand you're tops in the line.'

I could see that pleased her. She nodded thoughtfully. 'Not without reason, Mike. It has meant a good deal of exacting work both in and out of the office. We only handle work for the better houses and use the best in the selections of models. Anton, you know, is comparatively unknown as a person, simply because he refuses to take credit for his photography, but his work is far above any of the others. I think you've seen the interest he takes in his job.'

'I would, too,' I said.

Her tongue came out again. 'You would, too. I bet nothing would get photographed.'

'I bet a lot would get accomplished.'

'In that case you'd be running headlong into our code of ethics.'

'Nuts! Pity the poor photographer. He does all the work and the potbellies have all the fun.' I dragged on my cigarette and squinted my eyes. 'You know, Clyde has a pretty business for himself.'

My casual reference to the guy brought her eyebrows up. 'Do you know him?'

'Sure, from way back. Ask him to tell you about me some day.'

'I don't know him that well myself. But if I ever get the chance I will. He's the perfect underworld type, don't you think?'

'Right out of the movies. When did he start running that place?'

Juno tapped her cheek with a delicate forefinger. 'Oh . . . about six months ago, I think. I remember him stopping in the office to buy photographs in wholesale lots. He had the girls sign all the pictures and invited them to his opening. It was all very secret, of course. I didn't get to go myself until I heard the girls raving about the place. He did the same thing with most of the agencies in town.'

'He's got a brain, that boy,' I drawled. 'It's nice to have your picture on the wall. He played the girls for slobs and they never knew it. He knew damn well that a lot of them travelled with the moneybags and would pull them into his joint. When word got around that there was open gambling to boot, business got better and better. Now he gets the tourists too. They think it's all very smart and exciting . . . the kind who go around hoping for a raid so they can cut their pictures out of the papers and send them home to the folks for laughs.'

She stared at me, frowning.

'I wonder who he pays off?' I mused.

'Who?'

'Let's go home,' I said. 'There's still some day and a long night ahead of me.'

She was wanting me to ask her to continue this day and not break it off now, but I didn't let myself think it. Juno pushed back her chair and stood up. 'The nose. First I must powder the nose, Mike.' I watched her walk away from me, watched the swing of her hips and the delicate way she seemed to balance on her toes. I wasn't the only one watching, either. A kid who had artist written all over her in splotches of paint was leaning against the partition of the booth behind me. His eyes were hard and hot and followed Juno every step of the way. She was another one of those mannish things that breed in the half-light of the so-called aesthetical world. I got a look that told me I was in for competition and she took off after Juno. She came back in a minute and her face was pulled tight in a scowl and I gave her a nasty laugh. Some women yes. Others, nix.

My nose got powdered first, and I waited by the door for her after throwing a good week's pay to the cashier.

The snow that had slacked off started again in earnest. A steady stream of early traffic poured out of the business section, heading home before the stuff got too deep. Juno had snow tyres on the heap so I wasn't worried about getting caught, but it took us twice the time to get back uptown as it did to come down.

Juno decided against going back to the office and told me to go along Riverside Drive. At the most fashionable of the cross-streets I turned off and went as far as the middle of the block. She indicated a new grey-stone building that stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the others, boasting a doorman in a maroon uniform and topcoat. She leaned back and sighed, 'We're home.'

'Leave the car here?'

'Won't you need it to get where you're going?'

'I couldn't afford to put gas in this buggy. No, I'll take a cab.'

I got out and opened the door. The maroon uniform walked over and tipped his hat. Juno said, 'Have the car taken to the garage for me, please?'

He took the keys. 'Certainly, Miss Reeves.'

She turned to me with a grin. The snow swirling around her clung to the fur of her collar and hat, framing her face with a sprinkling of white. 'Come up for a drink?' I hesitated. 'For one, Mike, then I'll let you go.'

'O.K., baby, just one and don't try to make it any more.'

Juno didn't have a penthouse, but it was far enough up to make a good Olympus. There was no ~~garage~~ ~~and the~~ ~~time~~ ~~was~~ place, big as it was. The furnishings and the ~~time~~ ~~was~~

matched in the best of taste, designed for complete, comfortable living.

I kept my coat and hat on while she whipped up a cocktail, my eyes watching the lithe grace of her movements. There was an unusual symmetry to her body that made me want to touch and feel. Our eyes met in the mirror over the sofa and there was the same thing in hers as there must have been in mine.

She spun around with an eloquent gesture and held out the glasses. Her voice was low and husky again. 'I'm just a breeze past thirty, Mike. I've known many men. I've had many men, too, but none that I really wanted. One day soon I'm going to want you.'

My spine chilled up suddenly and the crazy music let loose in my head because she had the light in her hair again. The stem of the glass broke off in my fingers, tearing into my palm. The back of my neck got hot and I felt the sweat pop out of my forehead.

I moved so the light would be out of her hair and the gold would be gone from it, covering up the insane hatred of memory by lifting my hands to drink from the bowl of the broken glass.

It spoiled the picture for me, a picture that should be beautiful and desirable, scarred by something that should be finished but kept coming back.

I put the pieces of the glass down on the windowsill and she said, 'You looked at me that way again, Mike.'

This time I forced the memory out of my mind. I slipped my hand over hers and ran my fingers through her hair, sifting its short silky loveliness. 'I'll make it up to you sometime, Juno. I can't help thinking and it hasn't got anything to do with you.'

'Make it up to me now.'

I gave her ear a little pull. 'No.'

'Why?'

'Because.'

She pouted and her eyes tried to convince me.

I couldn't tell her that it was because there was a time and place for everything, and though this was the time and place she wasn't the person. I was only a mortal. A mortal doesn't undress a goddess and let his eyes feast and his hands feel and his body seek fulfilment.

Then, too, maybe that wasn't the reason at all. Maybe she reminded me of something else I could never have.

Never.

She said it slowly. 'Who was she, Mike? Was she lovely?'

I couldn't keep the words back. I tried, but they wouldn't

stay there. 'She was loving
that ever lived and
thing and I played
the sentence was death.
she died I died too.'

Juno never said
offered themselves
dead . . . not to be.

I lit a cigarette
out of there before
eyes burning in my

Juno, goddess of
gods and goddesses
and love? Juno was a
war

My eyes felt tight and my lips were pulled back over my teeth. My voice cut into the air and faces turned my way. 'Twice the same day,' I said, 'right on Broadway, too. The crazy bastard, the crazy son-of-a-bitch!'

I didn't remember getting to the car lot or driving out through traffic. I must have been muttering to myself because the drivers of cars that stopped alongside me at red lights would look over and shake their heads like I was nuts or something. Maybe I was. It scares me to be set up as a target right off the busiest street in the world.

That first window. I thought it was an accident. The second one had a bullet hole in the middle of it just before it came apart and splashed all over the pavement.

The building where I held down an office had a parking space in the basement. It was empty. I drove in and rolled to a corner and locked up. The night man took my keys and let me sign the register before letting me take the service elevator up to my floor.

When I got out I walked down the corridor, looking at the darkened glass of the empty offices. Only one had a light behind it and that one was mine. When I rattled the knob the latch snapped back and the door opened.

Velda said. 'Mike! What are you doing here?'

I brushed right past her and went to the filing cabinet where I yanked at the last drawer down. I had to reach all the way in the back behind the rows of well-stuffed envelopes to get what I wanted.

'What happened, Mike?' She was standing right beside me, her lip caught between her teeth. Her eyes were on the little .25 automatic I was shoving in my pocket.

'No bastard is going to shoot at me,' I told her. My throat felt dry and hoarse.

'When?'

'Just now. Not ten minutes ago. The bastard did it right out in the open. You know what that means?'

That animal snarl crossed her face and was gone in a second. 'Yes. It means that you're important all of a sudden.'

'That's right, important enough to kill.'

She said it slowly, hoping I had the answer. 'Did you . . . see who it was?'

'I saw a face. Half of it. Not enough to tell who it was except that it was a man. That face will try again and when it does I'll blow the hell out of it.'

'Be careful, Mike. You don't have a licence any more. The D.A. would love to run you in on a Sullivan charge.'

I got up out of my crouch and gave her a short laugh. 'The

law is supposed to protect the people. If the D.A. wants to jug me I'll make a good time out of it. I'll throw the constitution in his face. I think one of the first things it says is that the people are allowed to bear arms. Maybe they'll even have to revoke the Sullivan Law and then we'll really have us a time.'

'Yeah, a great whizbang, bang-up affair.'

For the first time since I came in I took notice of her. I don't know how the hell I waited so long. Velda was wearing a sweeping, black, evening gown that seemed to start halfway down her waist, leaving the top naked as sin. Her hair, falling around her shoulders, looked like onyx and I got a faint whiff of a deep, sensual aroma.

There was no fullness to the dress. It clung. There was no other word for it. It just clung, and under it there wasn't the slightest indication of anything else. 'Is that all you got on?'

'Yes.'

'It's cold outside, baby.' I know I was frowning, but I couldn't help it. 'Where you going?'

'To see your friend Clyde. He invited me out to supper.'

My hand tightened into a fist before I could stop it. Clyde, the bastard! I forced a grin through the frown. It didn't come out so well. 'If I knew you would look like that I'd have asked you out myself.'

There was a time when she would have gotten red and slammed me across the jaw. There was a time when she would have broken any kind of a date to put away a hamburger in a diner with me. Those times had flown.

She pulled on a pair of elbow-length gloves and let me stand there with my mouth watering, knowing damn well she had me where it hurt. 'Business, Mike, business before pleasure always.' Her face was blank.

'I let my tone get sharp. 'What were you doing here before I came in?'

'There's a note on your desk explaining everything. I visited the Calway Merchandising Company and rounded up some photographs they took of the girls that night. You might want to see them. You take to pretty girls, don't you?'

'Shut up.'

She glanced at me quickly so I wouldn't see the tears that made her eyes shine. When she walked to the desk to get her coat I started swearing under my breath at Clyde again because the bastard was getting the best when I had never seen it. That's what happens when something like Velda is right under your nose.

I said it again. This time there was no sharpness in my voice. 'I wish I had seen you like that before, Velda.'

She took a minute to put on her coat and it was so quiet in

that room I could hear her breathing. She turned around, the tears were still there. 'Mike . . . I don't have to tell you that you can see me any way you like . . . any time.'

I had her in my arms, pressing her against me, feeling every warm, vibrant contour of her body. Her mouth reached for mine and I tasted the wet sweetness of her lips, felt her shudder as my hands couldn't keep off the whiteness of her skin. My fingers dug into her shoulders leaving livid red marks. She tore her mouth away with a sob and spun around so I couldn't see her face, and with one fast motion that happened too quickly she put her hands over mine and slid them over the flesh and on to the dress that clung and down her body that was so warmly alive, then pulled away and ran to the door.

I put a cigarette in my mouth and forgot to light it. I could still hear her heels clicking down the hall. Absently I reached for the phone and dialled Pat's number out of habit. He said hello three times before I answered him and told him to meet me in my office.

I looked at my hands and the palms were damp with sweat. I lit my cigarette and sat there, thinking of Velda again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It took Pat thirty minutes to get there. He came in stamping the snow off his shoes and blowing like a bull moose. When he shed his coat and hat he threw a briefcase on the desk and drew up a chair.

'What are you looking so rosy about, Mike?'

'The snow. It always gets me. How'd you make out today?'

'Fine,' Pat said, 'just fine and dandy. The D.A. made a point of telling me to keep my nose clean again. If he ever gets boosted out of office I'm going to smack him right in the sneezer.' He must have read the surprise on my face. 'O.K., O.K., it doesn't sound like me. Go ahead and say it. I'm getting tired of being snarled up in red tape. You had it easy before you threw away your ticket and you didn't know it.'

'I'll get it back.'

'Perhaps. We have to make murder out of suicide first.'

'You almost had another on your hands today, chum.'

He stopped in the middle of a sentence and said, 'Who now?'

'Me.'

'You!'

'Little me. On a crowded street, too. Somebody tried to pop me with a silenced gun. All they got was two windows.'

'I'll be damned! We got a call on one of those windows, the one on Thirty-third. If the slug didn't poke a hole through all the scenery and land where it could be found it would have passed for an accident. Where was the other one?'

I told him and he said he would be damned again. He reached for the phone and buzzed headquarters to have them go through the window for the slug. When he hung up I said, 'What's the D.A. going to do when he hears about this?'

'Quit kidding. He isn't hearing anything. You know the rep you have . . . the bright boy'll claim it's one of your old friends sending a greeting card for the holidays.'

'It's too early for that.'

'Then he'll grab you on some trumped-up charge and get himself a big play in the papers. The hell with him!'

'You aren't talking like a good cop now, feller.'

Pat's face darkened and he leaned out of his chair with his teeth bared to the gums. 'There's a time when being a good cop won't catch a killer. Right now I'm teed off, Mike. We're both on a hot spot that may get hotter and I don't like it. It might be that I'm getting smart. A little favourable publicity never

hurts anybody and if the D.A. tries to trim my corns I'll have a better talking point if I have something I can toss at him.'

I laughed. Cripes, how I laughed! For ten years I had sung that song to him and now he was beginning to learn the words.

It was funnier now than it was in the beginning.

I said, 'What about Rainey? You find him?'

'We found him.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah what! He was engaged in the so-called legitimate profession of promoting fights. Some arena on the island. We couldn't tap him for a thing. What about him?'

There was a bottle of booze in the desk and I poured out two shots. 'He's in this, Pat. I don't know just how he fits, but he's there.' I offered a silent toast and we threw them down. It burned a path to my stomach and lay there like a hot coal. I put down the glass and sat on the windowsill. 'I went out to see Emil Perry. Rainey was there and had the guy scared silly. Even I couldn't scare him worse. Perry said Wheeler had spoken of suicide because business was bad; but a check showed his outfit to be making coin hand over fist. Riddle me that one.'

Pat whistled slowly.

I waited for him to collect his thoughts. 'Remember Dinky Williams, Pat?'

Pat let his head move up and down. 'Go on.' His face was getting that cop look on it.

I tried to make it sound casual. 'What's he doing now? You know?'

'No.'

'If I were to tell you that he was running a wide-open gambling joint right here in the city, what would you do?'

'I'd say you were crazy, it's impossible, then put the vice squad on it.'

'In that case I won't tell you about it.'

He brought his hand down on the desk so hard my cigarettes jumped. 'The hell you won't! You'll tell me about it right now! Who am I supposed to be—a rookie cop for you to play around with?'

It was nice to see him get mad again. I eased down off the windowsill and slumped in my chair. His face was red as a beet. 'Look, Pat. You're still a cop. You believe in the integrity and loyalty of the Force. You may not want to, but you'll be duty-bound to do just what you said. If you do a killer gets away.'

He went to talk, but I stopped him with a wave of my hand. 'Keep still and listen. I've been thinking that there's more to this than you or I have pictured. Dink's in it, Rainey's in it,

guys like Emil Perry are in it too. Maybe lots more we don't know about . . . yet. Dinky Williams is cleaning up a pretty penny right this minute running wheels and bars without a licence. Because I told you that don't go broadcasting it around. It may hurt you to be reminded of the fact, but just the same it has to be . . . if Dinky Williams runs a joint, then somebody is getting paid off. Somebody big. Somebody important. Either that or a whole lot of small somebodies who are mighty important when you lump 'em all together. Do you want to fight that set-up?

'You're damned well told I do!'

'You want to keep your badge? You think you can buck it?'

His voice was a hoarse whisper. 'I'll do it.'

'You have another think coming and you know it. You'd just like to do it. Now, listen to me. I have an inside track on this thing. We can play it together or not, but we're doing it my way or you can stick your nose in the dirt and root up the facts yourself. It won't be easy. If Dinky is paying off we can get the whole crowd at once, not just Dinky. Now call it.'

I think if I had had a licence it would have been gone right there, friend or no friend. All I had was a name on the door that didn't mean anything now. Pat looked at me with disgust and said, 'What a great Captain of Homicide I am! The D.A. would give his arm for a recording of this little conversation. O.K. Inspector, I'm waiting for my orders.'

I gave him a two-fingered salute. 'First, we want a killer. To get him we need to know why Wheeler was killed. If you want to mention the fact that a certain guy named Clyde was hanging for trouble you might get results. They won't be pretty results, but they might show us where to look.'

'Who's Clyde?' There was an ominous tone in his voice.

'Clyde is Dinky's new monicker. He got fancy.'

Pat was grinning now. 'The name is trouble. Mike I've heard it mentioned before.' He stood up and pulled a cigarette from my deck of Luckies. I sat there and waited. 'What's going on? Ward politics now.'

'So?'

'So you're a pretty smart bastard. I've been a cop. You'd be Commissioner if you were the other. You might still be dead.'

'I almost was this afternoon.'

'Sure. I can see why. This Clyde guy was pulling keys by their tails. He gets every parking ticket to a murder rap. He's got the name and somebody starts hanging around. My friend Dinky has really come up in the world.'

'Nuts! He's a small-time fella.'

'Is he? If it's the same guy we're talking about he's able to pull a lot of strings.'

Pat was too calm. I didn't like it. There were things I wanted to ask him and I was afraid of the answers. I said, 'How about the hotel? You checked there, didn't you?'

'I did. Nobody registered the day of the killing, but there were quite a few guests admitted to other rooms that same night. They all had plausible alibis.'

That time I let out a string of dirty words. Pat listened and grinned again. 'Will I see you tomorrow, Mike?'

'Yeah. Tomorrow.'

'Stay away from store windows.'

He put on his hat and slammed the door. I went back to looking at the pictures Velda had left on my desk. The girl named Marion Lester was laughing into the camera from the folds of a huge fur-collared coat. She looked happy. She didn't look like she'd be drunk in another couple of hours and have to be put to bed by a friend of mine who died not long after.

I slid all the photos in the folder and stuffed them in the desk drawer. The bottle was still half full and the glass empty. I cured that in a hurry. Pretty soon it was the other way around, then there was nothing in either of them and I felt better. I pulled the phone over by the cord and dialled a number that I had written on the inside of a matchbook cover.

A voice answered and I said, 'Hello, Connie . . . Mike.'

'My ugly lover! I thought you'd forgotten me.'

'Never, child. What are you doing?'

'Waiting for you.'

'Can you wait another half-hour?'

'I'll get undressed for you.'

'You get dressed for me because we may go out.'

'It's snowing.' She sounded pained. 'I don't have galoshes.'

'I'll carry you.' She was still protesting when I stuck the receiver on its arms.

There was a handful of .25 shells in the drawer that I shovelled into my pocket, little bits of insurance that might come in handy. Just before I left I pulled out the drawer and hauled out the envelope of photographs. The last thing I did was type a note for Velda telling her to let me know how she made out.

The guy in the parking lot had very thoughtfully put the skid chains on my buggy and earned himself a couple of bucks. I backed out and joined the line of cabs and cars that pulled their way through the storm.

Connie met me at the door with a highball in her hand and shoved it at me before I could take off my hat. 'My hero,' she

said, 'my big, brave hero coming through the raging blizzard to rescue poor me.'

It was a wonderful highball. I gave her back the empty and kissed her cheek. Her laugh was little bells that tinkled in my ear. She closed the door and took my coat while I went inside and sat down. When she joined me she sat on the sofa with her legs crossed under her and reached for a smoke. 'About tonight . . . we are going where?'

'Looking for a killer.'

The flame of the match she held trembled just a little. 'You . . . know?'

I shook my head. 'I suspect.'

There was real interest in her face. Her voice was soft. 'Who?'

'I suspect a half-dozen people. Only one of them is a killer. The rest contributed to the crime somehow.' I played with the cord on the floor lamp and watched the assorted expressions that flickered across her face.

Finally she said, 'Mike . . . is there some way I can help? I mean, is it possible that something I know might have a meaning?'

'Possibly.'

'Is that . . . the only reason you came here tonight?'

I turned the light off and on a few times. Connie was staring at me hard, her eyes questioning. 'You don't have much faith in yourself, kid,' I grinned. 'Why don't you look in the mirror sometime? You got a face that belongs in the movies and a body that should be a crime to cover. You have an agile mind, too. I'm only another guy. I go for all that.'

'The answer is yes, that's all I came here for tonight. If you were anybody else I still would have come, but because you're you it makes it all the nicer and I look forward to coming. Can you understand that?'

Her legs swung down and she came over and kissed my nose, then went back to the couch. 'I understand, Mike. Now I'm happy. Tell me what you want.'

'I don't know, Connie. I'm up a tree. I don't know what to ask for.'

'Just ask for anything you want.'

I shrugged. 'O.K., do you like your work?'

'Wonderful.'

'Make a lot of jack?'

'Oodles.'

'Like your boss?'

'Which one?'

'Juno.'

Connie spread her hands out in a non-committal gesture.

'Juno never interferes with me. She had seen my work and was impressed with it. When I had a call from her I was thrilled to the bones because I hit the top. Now all she does is select those ads that fit me best and Anton takes care of the rest.'

'Juno must make a pile,' I said observingly.

'I guess she does! Besides drawing a big salary she's forever on the receiving end of gifts from over-generous clients. I'd almost feel sorry for Anton if he had the sense to care.'

'What about him?'

'Oh, he's the arty type. Doesn't give a hoot for money as long as he has his work. He won't let a subordinate handle the photography, either. Maybe that's why the agency is so successful.'

'He married? A wife would cure that.'

'Anton married? That's a laugh. After all the women he handles, and I do mean handles, what mere woman would attract that guy. He's positively frigid. For a Frenchman that's disgraceful.'

'French?'

Connie nodded and dragged on her smoke. 'I overheard a little secret being discussed between Anton and Juno. It seems that Juno met him in France and brought him over here, just in time for him to escape some nasty business with the French court. During the war he was supposed to have been a collaborator of a sort . . . taking propaganda photos of all the bigwig Nazis and their families. As I said, Anton doesn't give a hoot about money or politics as long as he has his work.'

'That's interesting but not very helpful. Tell me something about Clyde.'

'I don't know anything about Clyde except that looking like a movie gangster he is a powerful attraction for a lot of jerks from both sexes.'

'Do the girls from the studio ever give him a play?'

She shrugged again. 'I've heard rumours. You know the kind. He hands out expensive presents to everybody during the holidays and is forever treating someone to a lavish birthday party under the guise of friendship when it's really nothing but good business practice. I know for a fact that the crowd has stuck to the Bowery longer than they ever have to another fad. I'm wondering what's going to happen when Clyde gets ordinary people.'

'So am I,' I said. 'Look, do something for me. Start inquiring around and see who forms his clientele. Important people. The kind of people who have a voice in the city. It'll mean getting yourself invited to the Inn, but that ought to be fun.'

'Why don't you take me?'

'I'm afraid that Clyde wouldn't like that. You shouldn't have any trouble getting an escort. How about one of those ten other guys?'

'It can be managed. It would be more fun with you though.'

'Maybe some other time. Has one of those ten guys got dough?'

'They all have.'

'Then take the one with the most. Let him spend it. Be a little discreet if you start to ask questions and don't get too pointed with them. I don't want Clyde to get sore at you too. He can think of some nasty games to play.' I had the group of photos behind my back and I pulled them out. Connie came over to look at them. 'Know all these girls?'

She nodded as she went through them. 'Clotheshorses, every one. Why?'

I picked out the one of Marion Lester and held it out. 'Know her well?'

She made a nasty sound with her mouth. 'One of Juno's pets,' she said. 'Came over from the Stanton Studio last year when Juno offered her more money. She's one of the best, but she's a pain.'

'Why?'

'Oh, she thinks she's pretty hot stuff. She's been playing around a lot besides. One of these days Juno will can her. She's got a tramp complex that will lose the agency some clients one of these days.' She rifled through some of the others and took out two, one a shot of a debutante type in a formal evening gown that was almost transparent. 'This is Rita Loring. You wouldn't think it, but she saw thirty-five plenty of years ago. One of the men at the show that night hired her at a fabulous sum to model exclusively for him.'

The other photo was a girl in a sports outfit of slacks, vest and blouse, touched with fancy gimcracks that women like. She was photographed against a background that was supposed to represent a girl's dormitory. 'Little Jean Trotter, our choice teen-age type. She eloped the day before yesterday. She sent Juno a letter and we all chipped in to buy her a television set. Anton was quite perturbed, since she left in the middle of a series. Juno had to pat his hand to calm him down. I never saw him get so mad.'

She handed the pictures back to me and I put them away. The evening was early so I told her to get busy on the phone and arrange herself a date. She didn't like it, but she did it so I'd get jealous. She did the damndest job of seduction over the telephone I'd ever heard. I sat there and grinned until she got mad and took it out on the guy on the other end. She said

she'd meet him in a hotel lobby downtown to save time, and hung up.

'You're a stinker, Mike,' she said.

I agreed with her. She threw my coat at me and climbed into her own. When we reached the street entrance I did like I said and carried her out to the car. She didn't get her feet wet, but the snow blew up her dress and that was just as bad. We had supper in a sea-food place, took time for a drink and some small talk, then I dumped her in front of the hotel where she was to meet her date. I kissed her so-long and she stopped being mad.

Now I had to keep me a couple of promises. One was a promise to outdo a character named Rainey. I followed a plough up Broadway for a few blocks, dragging along at a walk. To give it time to get ahead of me I pulled to the kerb on a side street and walked back to a corner bar. This time I went right to the phone and shoved in a nickel.

I had to wait through that nickel and another one before Joe Gill finally pulled himself out of the tub and came to the phone. He barked a sharp hello and I told him it was me.

'Mike,' he started, 'if you don't mind, I'd rather not . . .'

'What kind of a pal are you, chum? Look, you're not getting into anything. All I want is another little favour.'

I heard him sigh. 'All right. What is it now?'

'Information. The guy is Emil Perry, a manufacturer. He has a residence in the Bronx. I want to know all about him, socially and financially.'

'Now you're asking a toughie. I can put some men on his social life, but I can't go into his financial status too deeply. There're laws, you know.'

'Sure, and there're ways to get around them. I want to know about his bank accounts even if you have to break into his house to get them.'

'Now, Mike!'

'You don't *have* to do it, you know.'

'What the hell's the use of arguing with you. I'll do what I can, but this time we're even on all past favours, understand? And don't do me any more I'll have to repay.'

I laughed at him. 'Quit being a worrier. If you get in trouble I'll see my pal the D.A. and everything will be okeydoke.'

'That's what I'm afraid of. Keep in touch with me and I'll see what I can do.'

'Roger. Night. Joe.'

He grunted a goodbye and the phone clicked in my ear. I laughed again and opened the door of the booth. Soon I ought to know what Rainey had on the ball to scare the hell out of

a big shot like Perry. Meanwhile I'd find out if I could be scared a little myself.

The *Globe* presses were grinding out a late edition with a racket that vibrated throughout the entire building. I went in through the employees' entrance and took the elevator up to the rewrite room where the stutter of typewriters sounded like machine guns. I asked one of the copy boys where I could find Ed Cooper and he pointed to a glass-enclosed room that was making a little racket all its own.

Ed was the sports editor on the *Globe* with a particular passion for exposing the crumbs that made money the easy way, and what he didn't know about his business wasn't worth knowing. I opened the door and walked into a fullscale barrage that he was pouring out of a mill as old as he was.

He looked up without stopping, said, 'Be right with you, Mike.'

I sat down until he finished his paragraph and played with the .25 in my jacket pocket.

My boy must have liked what he wrote because he had a satisfied leer on his face that was going to burn somebody up. 'Spill it, Mike. Tickets or information?'

'Information. A former hood named Rainey is a fight promoter. Where and who does he promote?'

Ed took it right in stride. 'Know where the Glenwood Housing project is out on the island?'

I said I did. It was one of those cities-within-a-city ~~sorts~~ that catered to ex-G.I.s within an hour's drive from New York.

'Rainey's in with a few other guys and they built this ~~area~~ to get the trade from Glenwood. They put on fights and wrestling bouts, all of it stinko. Just the same, they pack ~~em in~~ in. Lately there's been some talk of the fight boys going in the tank so's a local betting ring can clean up. I got that place on my list if it's any news to you.'

'Fine, Ed. There's a good chance that Rainey will be making the news soon. If I'm around when it happens I'll give you a buzz.'

'You going out there tonight?'

'That's right.'

Ed looked at his watch. 'They got a show on. If you stay on it you might catch the first bout.'

'Yeah,' I said. 'It oughta be real interesting. I'll tell you about it when I get back to the city.' I put on my hat and opened the door. Ed stopped me before I got out.

'Those guys I was telling you about—Rainey's partners—they're supposed to be plenty tough. Be careful.'

'I'll be very careful, Ed. Thanks for the warning.'

I went out through the clatter and pounding beat of the

presses and found my car. Already the snow had piled up on the hood, pulling a white blind over the windows. I wiped it off and climbed in.

One thing about the city: it was mechanized to the point of perfection. The snow had been coming down for hours now, yet the roads were passable and getting better every minute. What the ploughs hadn't packed down the cars did, with big black eyes of manhole covers steaming malevolently on every block.

By the time I reached the arena outside the Glenwood area I could hear the howling and screaming of the mob. The parking place was jammed and overflowed out on to the street. I found an open spot a few hundred yards down the street that was partially protected by a huge oak and rolled in.

I had missed the first bout, but judging from the stumble-bums that were in there now I didn't miss much. It cost me a buck for a wall seat so far back I could hardly see through the smoke to the ring. Moisture dripped from the cinder-block walls and the seats were nothing more than benches roughed out of used lumber. But the business they did there was terrific.

It was a usual crowd of plain people hungry for entertainment and willing to pay for it. They could do better watching television if they stayed home. I sat near the door and let my eyes become accustomed to the semi-darkness. The last few rows were comparatively empty, giving me a fairly full view of what went on in the aisles.

There was a shout from the crowd and one of the pugs in the ring was counted out. A few minutes later he was carted up the aisle and out into the dressing-room. Some other gladiators took their places.

By the end of the fourth bout everybody who was going to be there was there. The two welters who had waltzed through the six rounds went past me into the hall behind the wall trailing their managers and seconds. I got up and joined the procession. It led to a large, damp room lined with cheap metal lockers and wooden, plank benches with a shower-room spilling water all over the floor. The whole place reeked of liniment and sweat. Two heavies with bandaged hands were playing cards on the bench, keeping score with spit marks on the floor.

I walked over to one of the cigar-smoking gents in a brown striped suit and nudged him with a thumb. 'Where's Rainey?'

He shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth and said, 'Inna office, I guess. You gotta boy here tonight?'

'Naw,' I told him. 'My boy's in bed wita cold.'

'Tough. Can't make a dime that way.'

'Naw.'

He shifted the cigar back, bringing an end to that. I went

looking for the office that Rainey was in. I found it down at the end of the hall. A radio was playing music in the fight that was going on in the Garden. There was another door leading to the office because it sounded like there was a mumble of voices. One started to open the door until another told him to shut up. The swarming voices mumbled again, the door slammed and the music was the radio blaring.

I stood there a good five minutes and heard the end of the fight. The winner was telling his story of the bout and the air when the radio was switched off. I opened the door and walked in.

Rainey was sitting at a table counting the money for the night, stacking bills in untidy piles and keeping a small red book. I had my hand on the knob and saw him as noiselessly as I could. There was a small table next to the knob and I slid it into the hump.

If Rainey hadn't been counting our kind of money he would have heard me come in. As it was, I heard him say 'one thousand mark' before I said, 'Good evening, Rainey.'

Rainey said, 'Shut up,' and went on counting.

I said, 'Rainey.'

His fingers paused over a stack of bills. He looked at me in slow motion until he was looking at me over his shoulder. The padding in his coat obscured the lower half of his face. He tried to picture it through the back window of a car parked up Thirty-third Street. It didn't match the picture he had in his mind much either.

Rainey was a guy you could define easily. He had one of those faces that looked painted on, a permanent mixture of fear and toughness blended by a sneer that was a habit. His eyes were cold, merciless marbles behind thick, heavy, fleshy lids.

Rainey was a tough guy.

I leaned against the door jamb with a cigarette in my mouth, one hand in my pocket and the other holding a little .25. Maybe he didn't think I had a gun, but he rolled up into a snarl and he reached under the table.

I rapped the gun against the door jamb and saw through the cloth of the coat you could tell that he was a tough guy. Rainey started to lose that tough look. 'What the hell is Rainey?'

He didn't say anything.

I took a long shot in the back of his head. Rainey. You saw me on the front of a plate-glass window.

His lower lip fell away from his face and I could see his teeth.

of the marbles that he had for eyes. I kept my hand in my pocket while I reached under the table and pulled out a short-nosed .32 that hung there in a clip.

Rainey finally found his voice. 'Mike Hammer,' he said. 'What the hell got into you?'

I sat on the edge of the table and flipped all the bills to the floor. 'Guess.' Rainey looked at the dough then back to me.

The toughness came back in a hurry. 'Get out of here before you get tossed out, copper.' He came halfway out of his seat.

I palmed that short-nosed .32 and laid it across his cheek with a crack that split the flesh open. He rocked back into his chair with his mouth hanging, drooling blood and saliva over his chin. I sat there smiling, but nothing was funny.

I said, 'Rainey, you've forgotten something. You've forgotten that I'm not a guy that takes any crap. Not from anybody. You've forgotten that I've been in business because I stayed alive longer than some guys who didn't want me that way. You've forgotten that I've had some punks tougher than you'll ever be at the end of a gun and I pulled the trigger just to watch their expressions change.'

He was scared, but he tried to bluff it out anyway. He said, 'Why don'tcha try it now, Hammer? Maybe it's different when ya don't have a licence to use a rod. Go ahead, why don'tcha try it?'

He started to laugh at me when I pulled the trigger of the .32 and shot him in the thigh. He said, 'My God!' under his breath and grabbed his leg. I raised the muzzle of the gun until he was looking right into the little round hole that was his ticket to hell.

'Dare me some more, Rainey.'

He made some blubbering noises and leaned over the chair to puke on the money that was scattered around his feet. I threw the little gun on the table. 'There's a man named Emil Perry. If you go near him again I'll put the next slug right where your shirt meets your pants.'

I shouldn't have been so damn interested in the sound of my own voice. I should have had the sense to lock the other door. I should've done a lot of things and there wouldn't have been anybody standing behind me saying, 'Hold it, brother, just hold it right there.'

A tall, skinny guy came around the table and took a long look at Rainey, who sat there too sick to speak. The other one held a gun in my back. The skinny one said, 'He's shot! You bastard, you'll catch it for this!' He straightened up and backhanded me across the mouth nearly knocking me off the table. 'You a heist artist? Answer me, damn you!' The hand lashed out into my mouth again and this time I did go off the table.

The guy with the gun brought it down across the back of my neck throwing a spasm of pain shooting through my head and shoulders. He stood in front of me this time, a short pasty-faced guy with the urge to kill written all over him. 'I'll handle this, Artie. These big boys are the kind of meat I like.'

Rainey retched and moaned again. I picked myself up slowly and Rainey said, 'Gimme the gun. Lemme do it. God-damn it, gimme that gun!' The skinny guy put his arms around his waist and lifted him to his feet so he could hobble over to the wall where I was.

The guy with the automatic in his hand grinned and took a step nearer. It was close enough. I rammed my hand against the slide and shoved it back while his finger was trying like hell to squeeze the trigger. It didn't take much effort to rip it right out of his hand while I threw my knee between his legs into his groin. He hit the floor like a bag of wet sand and lay there gasping for breath.

Some day the people who make guns will make one that can't be jammed so easily. The skinny guy holding Rainey let go and made a dive for the .32 on the table.

'I shot him in the leg too.'

That was all Rainey needed. The toughness went out of him and he forgot about the hole in his thigh long enough to stagger back to his chair and hold his hands up in front of him, trying to keep me away. I threw the automatic on the table with the .32.

'Somebody told me you boys were pretty rough,' I said. 'I'm a little disappointed. Don't forget what I told you about Emil Perry.'

The other guy with the hole in his leg sobbed for me to call a doctor. I told him to do it himself. I stepped on a pack of ten-dollar bills and they tore under my shoe. The little guy was still vomiting. I opened the door and looked back at the three tough guys and laughed. 'A doctor'll have to report those gunshot wounds,' I reminded them. 'It would be a good idea to tell him you were cleaning a war souvenir and it went off.'

Rainey groaned again and clawed for the telephone on the table. I was whistling when I shut the door and started back towards my car. All that time gone to waste, I thought. I had been playing it soft when I should have played it hard.

There had been enough words. Now the fun ought to start.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I WAS in bed when Joe called. The alarm had been set for eleven-thirty and was five minutes short of going off. I drawled a sleepy hello and Joe told me to wake up and listen.

'I'm awake,' I said. 'Let's hear it.'

'Don't ask me how I got this stuff. I had to do some tall conniving, but I got it. Emil Perry has several business accounts, a checking account for his wife and a large personal savings account. All of them except his own personal account was pretty much in order. Six months ago he made a cash withdrawal of five thousand bucks. That was the first. It's happened every other month since then, and yesterday he withdrew all but a few hundred. The total he took out in cash was an even twenty thousand dollars.'

'Wow,' I said, 'Where did it go?'

'Getting a line on his personal affairs wasn't as easy as I thought. Item one, he has a wife and family he loves almost as much as his standing in the community. Item two, he likes to play around with the ladies. Item three, put item one and two together and what do you have?'

'Blackmail,' I said 'All the set-up for blackmail. Is that all?'

'As much as I had time for. Now, if there's nothing else on your mind, and I hope there isn't, I'll be seeing you never again.'

'You're a real pal, Joe. Thanks a million.'

'Don't do me any more favours, Mike—hear?'

'Yeah, I hear. Thanks again.'

There was too much going on in my head to stay in bed. I crawled under the shower and let it bite into my skin. When I cried off I shaved, brushed my teeth and went out and had breakfast. Fat little Emil scared to death of Rainey. Fat little Emil making regular and large withdrawals from the bank. A good combination. Rainey had to get dough enough to throw in the kitty to build that arena some way.

I looked out the window at the grey sky that still had a lot of snow in it, thinking that it was only the beginning. If what I had in mind worked out there ought to be a lot more to come.

The little .25 was still in the pocket of my jacket and it slapped against my side as I walked out to the elevator. The streets were clear and I told the boy to take off the chains and

oss them in the trunk. He made himself another couple of ucks. When I backed out of the garage I drove across to Broadway and turned north pointing for the Bronx.

This time the big sedan with the gold initials was gone. I drove around the block twice just to be sure of it. All the blinds on the upper floor were drawn and there was a look of desertion about the place. I parked on the corner and walked back, turning in at the entrance.

Three times I lifted the heavy bronze knocker, and when that didn't work I gave the door a boot with my foot. A kid on a bicycle saw me and shouted, 'They ain't home, mister. I seen 'em leave last night.'

I came down off the stoop and walked over to the kid. 'Who left?'

'The whole family, I guess. They was packing all kinds of stuff in the car. This morning the maid and the girl that does the cleaning left, too. They gimme a quarter to take some empty bottles back to the store. I kept the deposit, too.'

I fished in my pocket for another quarter and flipped it to him. 'Thanks, son. It pays to keep your eyes open.'

The kid pocketed the coin and took off down the street, the siren on the bike screaming. I walked back up the path to the house. A line of shrubs encircled the building and I worked my way behind them, getting my shoes full of snow and mud. Twice I stopped and had a look around to be sure there weren't any nosy neighbours ready to yell cop. The bushes did a good job. I felt all the windows, trying them to see if they were locked. They were.

I said the hell with it and wrenched a stone out of the mud and tapped the glass a good one. It made a racket, but nobody came around to investigate. When I had all the pieces picked out of the frame I grabbed the sill and hoisted myself into the room.

If sheet-covered chairs and closed doors meant what it looked like, Emil Perry had flown the coop. I tried the lamp and it didn't work. Neither did the phone. The room I was in seemed to be a small study, something where a woman would spend a lot of time. There was a sewing machine in the corner and a loom with a half-finished rug stretched out over nails in the framework.

The room led into a hallway of doors, all closed. I tried each one, peering into the yellow light that came through the blinds. Nothing was out of place, everything had been recently cleaned, and I backed out a little madder each time.

The hallway ran into a foyer that opened to the breezeway beside the house. On one side I could see the kitchen through a

small window in the wall. On the other side a heavily carpeted flight of stairs led to the next floor.

It was the same thing all over again. Everything neat as a pin. Two bedrooms, a bathroom, another bedroom and a study. The last door faced the front of the house and it was locked.

It was locked in two places, above and below the knob.

It took me a whole hour to get those damn things open.

No light at all penetrated this room. I flicked a match on my thumbnail and saw why. A blackout shade had been drawn over the other shade on each of the two windows. It didn't hurt to lift them up because nobody could see in through the outermost shade.

I was in Emil Perry's own private cubicle. There were faded pictures on the wall and some juicy calendar pin-ups scattered around on the tables and chairs. A day bed that had seen too many years sagged against one wall. Under one window was a desk and a typewriter, and alongside it a low, two-drawer filing cabinet. I wrenched it open and pawed through the contents. Most of it was business mail. The rest were deeds, insurance papers and some personal junk. I slammed the drawers shut and started taking the place apart slowly.

I didn't find a damn thing.

What I did find was in the tiny fireplace and burned to a crisp. Papers, completely burned papers that fell to dust as I touched them. Whatever they were, he had done a good job of burning them. Not one corner or bit showed that was anything but black.

I swore to myself and went back to the filing cabinet where I slid out an insurance policy on Perry's wife. I used the policy as a pusher to get all the bits into the envelope, then sealed the flap and put the policy back in the drawer.

Before I went out I tried to make sure everything was just like he had left it. When I gave a few things an extra adjustment I closed the door and let the two locks click into place.

I went out the same way I came in, making a rough attempt at wiping out the tracks I had left in the snow and mud behind the bushes. When I climbed in behind the wheel of my car I wasn't feeling too bad. Things were making a little more sense. I turned on the key, let the engine warm up and switched back to Manhattan.

At Fifty-ninth Street I pulled over and went into a drugstore and called the Calway Merchandising Outfit. They gave me Perry's business address and I put in a call to them too. When I asked for Mr Perry the switchboard operator told me to wait a moment and put through a connexion.

A voice said, 'Mr Perry's office'

'I'd like to speak to Mr Perry, please.'

'I'm sorry,' the voice said, 'Mr Perry has left town. We don't know when he'll be back. Can I help you?'

'Well . . . I don't know. Mr Perry ordered a set of golf clubs and wanted them delivered today. He wasn't at home.'

'Oh . . . I see. His trip was rather sudden and he didn't leave word here where he could be reached. Can you hold the parcel?'

'Yeah, we'll do that,' I lied.

Emil Perry had very definitely departed for parts unknown. I wondered how long he'd be away.

When I got back in my car I didn't stop until I had reached my office building. I had another package waiting for me. If I hadn't gone in through the basement it would have been a surprise package. The elevator operator gave a sudden start when I stepped in the car and looked at me nervously.

I said, 'What's the matter with you?'

He clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. 'Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, Mr Hammer, but some policemen went up to your office a little while ago. Real big guys they were. Two of 'em are watching the lobby besides.'

I stepped out of that car fast. 'Anybody in my office now?'

'Uh-huh. That pretty girl who works for you. Is there any trouble, Mr Hammer?'

'Plenty, I think. Look, forget you saw me. I'll make it up to you later.'

'Oh, that's all right, Mr Hammer. Glad to help.'

He closed the door and brought the elevator upstairs. I walked over to the phone on the wall and dropped in a nickel, then dialled my own number. I heard the two clicks as both Velda's phone and the extension were lifted at the same time.

Velda sounded nervous when she said good morning. I held my handkerchief over the mouthpiece and said, 'Mr Hammer, please.'

'I'm sorry, but he hasn't come in yet. Can I take a message?'

I grunted and made like I was thinking, then, 'Yes if you please. He is to meet me at the Cashmore Bar in Brooklyn in an hour from now. I'll be a few minutes late, so if he calls in, remind him.'

'Very well,' Velda replied. Her voice had a snicker in it now, 'I'll tell him.'

I stood there by the phone and let ten minutes go by slowly, then I put in another nickel and did the same thing over again. Velda said, 'You can come up now, Mike. They're gone. Brooklyn is a long way off.'

She had her feet up on the desk, paring her nails with a file, when I walked in. She said, 'Just like you used to do, Mike.'

small window in the wall. On the other side a heavily carpeted flight of stairs led to the next floor.

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'Rainey's dead,' I told her. 'I didn't kill him but I wish I had.'

Velda bit her lip. 'I figured as much. The D.A. is tagging you for it, isn't he?'

'Right on the nose. What happened last night?'

She handed me a glass and we lifted them together. Hers went down first. 'I won some money. Clyde got me slightly drunk and propositioned me. I didn't say no; I said later. He's still interested. I met a lot of people. That's what happened.'

'A waste of time.'

'Not entirely. We joined a party of visiting firemen and some very pretty young ladies. The life of the party was Anton Lipsk and he was quite drunk. He suggested they go up to his apartment in the Village and some of them did. I wanted to go, but Clyde made a poor excuse of not being able to break away from his business. One other couple refused, too, mainly because the boy friend was ahead on the roulette wheel and wanted to go back to it. The girl with him was the same one you had that night.'

'Connie?'

'Is that her name?' she asked coldly.

I grinned and said it was.

Velda rocked back in her seat and sipped the sherry. 'Two of the girls that went along with Anton worked with Connie. I heard them talking shop a few minutes before your girl friend made some catty remarks that brought the conversation to a halt.'

She waited until I had finished my drink. 'Where were you last night?'

'Out to see a guy named Rainey.'

Her face went white. 'But . . . but you told Pat . . .'

'I know. I said I didn't kill him. All I did was shoot him in the leg a little bit.'

'Good heavens! Then you did . . .'

I rocked my head from side to side until she got the idea. 'He wasn't hurt bad. The killer did me one better and plugged him after I left. That's the way it had to be. I'll find out the details later.' I stuck a cigarette in my mouth and let my eyes find hers while I lit it. 'What time did you meet Clyde last night?'

Her eyes dropped and her lips went into a pout. 'He made me wait until twelve o'clock. He said he was tied up with some work. I got halfway stood up, Mike, and right after you telling me how nice I looked.'

The match burned down to my fingers before I put it out. 'That gave him a chance to get out to Rainey, kill him and get back. That just about does it!' Velda's eyes popped wide-open

'I don't wear dresses you can see up, though.'

Her feet came down with a bang and she got red. 'How'd you find out'—her head nodded towards the door—'about them?'

'The elevator operator put me wise. He goes on our bonus list. What did they want?'

'You.'

'What for?'

'They seemed to think you shot somebody.'

'That snivelling little bastard had the nerve to do it!' I threw my hat at the chair and ripped out a string of curses. I swung around, mad as hell. 'Who were they?'

'They let me know they were from the D.A.'s office.' A little worried frown drew lines across her forehead. 'Mike . . . is it bad?'

'It's getting worse. Get me Pat on the phone, will you?'

While she was dialling I went to the closet and got out the other bottle of sherry. Velda handed me the phone as I finished, pouring two glasses.

I tried to make my voice bright but there was too much mad in it. I said, 'It's me, Pat. Some of the D.A.'s boys just paid me a visit.'

He sounded amazed. 'What are you doing there, then?'

'I wasn't here to receive them. A dirty dog sent them on a wild-goose chase to Brooklyn. What goes on?'

'You're in deep, Mike. This morning the D.A. sent out orders to pick you up. There was a shooting out on the Island last night. Two guys caught a slug and one of them was a fellow named Rainey.'

'Sounds familiar. Was I identified?'

'No, but you were seen in the vicinity and overheard threatening this Rainey fellow just a short time before.'

'Did Rainey say all this himself?'

'He couldn't very well. Rainey is dead.'

'What!' My voice sounded like an explosion.

'Mike . . .'

My mouth couldn't form an answer.

Pat said it again. 'Mike . . . did you kill him?'

'No,' I got out. 'I'll be in the bar up the street. Meet me there, will you. I have things to talk about.'

'Give me an hour. By the way, where were you last night?'

I paused. 'Home. Home in bed sound asleep.'

'Can you prove it?'

'No.'

'O.K., I'll see you in a little while.'

Velda had drained both glasses while I was talking and was filling them up again. She looked like she needed them.

people who live on both sides of you who have already sworn that they heard nothing going on in your place last night.'

I picked up the phone and asked for outside. I gave the number of the bar where I was supposed to meet Pat and watched the D.A. jot it down on a pad. Flynn, the Irish bartender, answered and I said, 'This is Mike Hammer, Flynn. There's a party there who can vouch for my whereabouts last night. Tell him to come up to the D.A.'s office, will you?'

He was starting to shout the message down the bar when I hung up. The D.A. had his legs crossed and kept rocking one knee up and down. 'I'll be expecting my licence back some time this week. With it I want a note of apology or you might not win the next election.'

One of the cops smacked me across the back of my head.

'What's the story?'

The D.A. couldn't keep still any longer. His lips went thin and he got a lot of pleasure out of his words. 'I'll tell you, Mr Hammer. Correct me if I'm wrong. You were out to the Glenwood Arena last night. You argued with this Rainey. Two men described you and identified you from your picture. Later, they were all in the office when you opened the door and started shooting. One was hit in the leg, Rainey was hit in the leg and head. Is that right?'

'Where's the gun?'

'I give you credit enough to have gotten rid of it.'

'What happens when you put those witnesses on the stand?'

He frowned and grated his teeth again.

'It sounds to me,' I told him, 'that they might make pretty crummy witnesses. They must be sterling characters.'

'They'll do,' he said. 'I'm waiting to hear who it is that can alibi you.'

I didn't have to answer that. Pat walked in the office, his face grey around the mouth, but when his eyes lit on the smirking puss of the D.A. it disappeared. Bright boy gave him an ugly stare. Pat tried for a little respect and didn't make it. I've heard him talk to guys in the line-up the same way he did to the D.A. 'I was with him last night. If you had let the proper department handle this you would have known it sooner. I went up to his apartment about nine and was there until 4 a.m. playing cards.'

The D.A.'s face was livid. I could see every vein in his hand as he gripped the ends of the desk. 'How'd you get in?'

Pat looked unconcerned. 'Through the back way. We parked around the block and walked through the buildings. Why?'

'What was so interesting at this man's apartment that made you go there?'

Pat said, 'Not that it's any of your business, but we played

and she swallowed hard. 'Oh, no, Mike . . . no! I—I was with him right after . . .'

'On Dinky it wouldn't show if he just killed a guy. Not on Dinky. He's got too many of 'em under his belt.'

I picked my hat from the chair where I had tossed it and straightened out the wrinkles in the crown. 'If the police call again stall 'em off. Don't mention Pat. If the D.A. is there call him a dirty name for me. I'll be back later.'

When I stepped out the door I knew I wasn't going to be anywhere later. A big burly character in high-top shoes got up off the top step where he was sitting and said, 'Lucky the boys left a couple of us here after all. They're gonna be mad when they get back from Brooklyn.' Another character just as big came from the other end of the hall and joined in on the other side.

I said, 'Let's see your warrant.'

They showed it to me. The first guy said, 'Let's go, Hammer, and no tricks unless you want a fist in your face.' I shrugged and marched over to the elevator with them.

The operator caught wise right off and shook his head sadly. I could see he was thinking that I should've known better. I squeezed over behind him as some others got on and by the time we hit the lobby I felt a little better. When the operator changed his uniform tonight he was going to be wondering where that .25 automatic came from. Maybe he'd even turn it into the cops like a good citizen. They'd have a swell time running down that toy.

There was a squad car right outside and I got in with a cop on either side of me. Nobody said a word and when I pulled out a pack of butts one of the cops slapped them out of my hands. He had three cigars stuffed in the breast pocket of his overcoat and when I faked a stretch my elbow turned them into mush. I got a dirty look for that. He got a better one back.

The D.A. had his office all ready for me. A uniformed cop stood by the door and the two detectives ushered me to a straight-backed chair and took their places behind it. The D.A. was looking very happy indeed.

'Am I under arrest?'

'It looks that way, doesn't it?'

'Yes or no?' I gave him the best sarcasm I could muster. His teeth grated together.

'You're under arrest,' he said. 'For murder.'

'I want to use the telephone.'

He started smiling again. 'Certainly. Go right ahead. I'll be glad to speak to you through a lawyer. I want to hear him try to tell me you were home in bed last night. When he does I'll drag in the super of your apartment, the doorman and the

'They're not so tough.'
'No . . . you wouldn't think so now, would you? Well, Mike, I'll be waiting to see what gives. It's been a long time since I had a scoop on the police beat.'

Pat wanted to know what I did and I told him I called the office. I straddled the stool and started to work on the high-ball. Pat had his almost finished. He was thinking. He was worried. I slapped him on the back, 'Cheer up, will you? For Pete's sake, all you did was make the D.A. eat his words. That ought to make you feel great.'

Pat didn't see it that way. 'Maybe I'm too much cop, Mike. I don't like to lie. If it wasn't that I smelt a frame I would have let you squirm out of it yourself. The D.A. wants your hide nailed to his door and he's trying hard to get it.'

'He came too damn close to getting it to suit me. I'm glad you got the drift of the situation and knew your way around my diggings well enough to make it sound good.'

'Hell, it *had* to sound good. How the devil would you be able to prove you were home in bed all night? That kind of alibi always looks mighty foolish on a witness stand.'

'I'd never be able to prove it in a million years, chum,' I said.

The drink almost fell out of his hand when it hit him. He grabbed my coat and spun me around on the stool. 'You *were* home in bed like you said, weren't you?'

'None. I was out seeing a guy named Rainey. In fact, I shot him.'

Pat's fingers loosened and his face went dead-white. 'God!'
I picked up my glass. 'I shot him, but it wasn't in the head. Somebody else did that. I hate like hell to put you on the spot, but if we're going to tie into a killer the both of us'll do better than just one.'

Pat rubbed his face. It still didn't have its normal colour back. I thought he was going to get sick until he gulped down his drink and signalled for another. His hands shook so bad he could hardly manage it without the ice chattering against the glass.

'You shouldn't have done it, Mike,' he said. 'Now I'll have to take you in myself. You shouldn't've done it.'

'Sure, take me in and have the D.A. eat your tail out. Have him get you booted off the Force so some incompetent jerk can take your place. Take me in so the D.A. can get his publicity at the expense of the people. Let a killer go around laughing his head off at us. That's what he wants.'

'Hell, can't you see the whole thing smells? It reeks from here to there and back again.' Pat stared into his glass, his head shaking in outrage. 'I went to see Emil Perry. Rainey was there. Perry tied up with Wheeler because he gave an excuse

cards. And talked about you. Mike here said some very uncomplimentary things about you. Shall I repeat them for the record?' .

Another minute of it and the guy would have had apoplexy. 'Never mind,' he gasped, 'never mind.'

'That's what I mean about having witnesses with sterling characters, mister,' I chipped in. 'I take it the charges are dropped?'

His voice barely had enough strength to carry across the room. 'Get out of here. You, too, Captain Chambers.' He let his eyes linger on Pat. 'I'll see about this later.'

I stood up and fished my other deck of Luckies. The cop with the smashed cigars still sticking out of his pockets watched me with a sneer. 'Got a light?' He almost gave me one at that until he realized what he was doing. I smiled at the D.A., a pretty smile that showed a lot of teeth. 'Remember about my licence. I'll give you until the end of the week.'

The guy flopped back in his chair and stayed there.

I followed Pat downstairs and out to his car. We got in and drove around for ten minutes going nowhere. Finally Pat muttered, 'I don't know how the hell you do it.'

'Do what?'

'Get in so much trouble.' That reminded me of something. I told him to stop and have a drink, and from the way he swung around traffic until we found a bar I could see that he needed it.

I left him at the bar to go back to the phone-booth where I dialled the *Globe* office and asked for the city editor. When Ed came on I said, 'This is Mike, Ed. I have a little favour to ask. Rainey was knocked off last night.'

He broke in with, 'Yeah, I thought you were going to tell me if anything happened. I've been waiting all day for you to call.'

'Forget it, Ed, things aren't what you're thinking. I didn't bump the bastard. I didn't know he was going to get bumped.'

'No?' His tone called me a liar.

'No,' I repeated. 'Now listen . . . what happened to Rainey is nothing. You can do one of two things. You can call the D.A. and say I practically forecasted what was going to happen last night or you can keep quiet and get yourself a scoop when the big boom goes off. What'll it be?'

He laughed, a typical soured reporter's laugh. 'I'll wait, Mike. I can always call the D.A., but I'll wait. By the way, do you know who Rainey's two partners were?'

'Tell me.'

'Petey Cassandro and George Hamilton. In Detroit they have quite a rep, all bad. They've both served stretches and they're as tough as they come.'

The bartender came down and filled up our glasses again. He shoved a bowl of peanuts between us and I dipped into them. Pat popped them into his mouth one at a time. 'I'll tell you what happened down there, Mike. The one guy who wasn't shot dragged his partner outside and yelled for help. He said nobody came so he left Rainey where he was figuring him to be dead and pulled his buddy into a car and drove to a doctor over in the Glenwood development. He called the cops from there. He described you, picked out your picture and there it was.'

'There it was is right. Right there you have a pay-off again. The killer came in after I left and either threatened those two guys or paid 'em off to put the bee on me and keep still as to what actually did happen. They both have records in Detroit and one carried a gun. It wouldn't do either one of 'em any good to get picked up on a Sullivan charge.'

'The D.A. has their affidavits.'

'You're a better witness for me, kid. What good is an affidavit from a pair of hoods when one of the finest sticks up for you?'

'It would be different under oath, Mike.'

'Nuts! As long as you came in when you did it never gets that far. The D.A. knew when he was licked. In one way I'm glad it happened.'

Pat told me to speak for myself and went back to his thinking. I let him chase ideas around for a while before I asked him what he was going to do. He said, 'I'm going to have those two picked up. I'm going to find out what really happened.'

I looked at him with surprise and laughed. 'Are you kidding, Pat? Do you really think either one of those babies will be sticking around after that?'

'One has a bullet hole in his leg,' he pointed out.

'So what?' I said. 'That's nothing compared to one in the head. Those guys are only so tough . . . they stop being tough when they meet somebody who's just a little bit tougher.'

'Nevertheless, I'm getting out a tracer on them.'

'Good! That's going to help if you find them. I doubt it. By the way, did you check on the bullets that somebody aimed at me?'

Pat came alive fast. 'I've been meaning to speak to you about that. They were both .38 specials, but they were fired from different guns. There's more than one person who wants you out of the way.'

Maybe he thought I'd be amazed just to be polite, at least. He was disappointed. 'I figured as much, Pat. It still works down to Rainey and Clyde. Like I said, when I left Perry, he

for Wheeler's suicide when actually he didn't even know the guy except to say hello to at business affairs. Perry ties in with Wheeler and Rainey ties in with Perry.

'Every month Perry had been pulling five grand out of his bank. Smell it now. Smells like blackmail, doesn't it? Go on, admit it. If you won't, here's something that will make you admit it. Yesterday Perry withdrew twenty grand and left town. That wasn't travelling expenses. That was to buy up his blackmail evidence. I went out to his house and found what was left of it in his fireplace.'

I reached inside my coat for the envelope and threw it down in front of him. He reached for it absently. 'Now I'll tell you what started the Rainey business. When I first saw Perry I told him I was going to find out what it was that Rainey had on him and lay the whole thing in the open. It scared him so much he passed out. Right away he calls Rainey. He wants to buy it back and Rainey agrees. But meanwhile Rainey has to do something about it. He took a shot at me right on Broadway and if I had caught a slug there wouldn't have been a single witness, that's the way people are.

'When I went out to see him I put it to him straight, and just to impress him I ploughed a hole in his leg. I did the same thing to one of his partners.'

I didn't think Pat had been listening, but he was. He turned his head and looked at me with eyes that had cooled down to a sizzle. 'Then how did Rainey stop that other bullet?'

'Let me finish. Rainey wasn't in this alone by a long shot. He wasn't that smart. He was taking orders and somewhere along the line he tried to take off on his own. The big boy knew what was cooking and went out to take care of Rainey himself. In the meantime he saw me, figured I'd do it for him, and when I didn't he stepped in and took over by himself.'

Pat was picturing the thing in his mind, trying to visualize every vivid detail. 'You've got somebody lined up, Mike. Who?'

'Who else but Clyde? We haven't tied Rainey to him yet, but we will. Rainey isn't hanging out in the Bowery because he likes it. I'll bet ten to one he's on tap for Clyde like a dozen other hard cases he keeps handy.'

Pat nodded. 'Could be. The bullets in Rainey's leg and head were fired from the same gun.'

'The other guy was different. I used his pal's automatic on him.'

'I don't know about that. The bullet went right through and wasn't found.'

'Well, I know about it. I shot him. I shot them both and left the guns right there on the table.'

CHAPTER NINE

I DIDN'T get to do what I wanted to do that night because when I went back for my car I checked into the office long enough to find Velda gone and a note on my desk to call Connie. The note was signed with a dagger dripping blood. Velda was being too damn prophetic.

Dagger or no dagger, I lifted the phone and dialled her number. Her voice didn't have a lilt in it today. 'Oh, Mike,' she said, 'I've been so worried.'

'About me?'

'Who else? Mike . . . what happened last night? I was at the club and I heard talk . . . about Rainey . . . and you.'

'Wait a minute, kitten, who did all this talking?'

'Some men came in from the fights on the Island and they mentioned what happened. They were sitting right behind me talking about it.'

'What time was that?'

'It must have been pretty late. Oh, I don't know, Mike. I was so worried I had Ralph take me home. I . . . I couldn't stand it. Oh, Mike . . . ' Her voice broke and she sobbed into the phone.

I said, 'Stay there. I'll be up in a little while and you can tell me about it.'

'All right, . . . but please hurry.'

I hurried. I passed red lights and full-stop intersections and heard whistles blowing behind me twice, but I got up there in fifteen minutes. The work-it-yourself elevator still wasn't working so I ran up the stairs and rapped on the door.

Connie's eyes were red from crying and she threw herself into my arms and let me squeeze the breath out of her. A lingering perfume in her hair took the cold out of my lungs and replaced it with a more pleasant sensation. 'Lovely, lovely,' I said. I laughed at her for crying and held her at arm's length so I could look at her. She threw her head back and smiled.

'I feel so much better now,' she said. 'I had to see you. Mike I don't know why I was so worried, but I was and couldn't help it.'

'Maybe that's because I remind you of your brothers.'

'Maybe, but that's not it.' Her lips were soft and red. I kissed them gently and her mouth asked for more.

must have called Rainey. It was just before lunch-time and maybe he figured I'd eat at home. Anyway, he went there and when I stopped to pick up my coat and gloves he started tailing me. I wasn't thinking of a tail so I didn't give it a thought. He must have stuck with me all day until I was alone and a good target.'

'That doesn't bring Clyde into it.'

'Get smart, Pat. If Rainey was taking orders from Clyde then maybe Clyde followed *him* around, too, just to be sure he didn't miss.'

'So Clyde took the second shot at you himself. You sure made a nice package of it. All you need is a photograph of the crime.'

'I didn't see enough of his face to be sure it was him, but it was a man in that car, and if he shot at me once he'll shoot at me again. That'll be the last time he'll shoot anyone.'

I finished my drink and pushed it across the bar for more. We both ordered sandwiches and ate our way through them without benefit of conversation. There was another highball to wash them down. I offered Pat a Lucky and we lit up, blowing the smoke at the mirror behind the bar.

I looked at him through the silvered glass. 'Who put the pressure on the D.A., Pat?'

'I've been wondering when you were going to ask that,' he said.

'Well! . . .'

'It came from some odd quarters. People complaining about killers running loose and demanding something be done about it. Some pretty influential people live out in Glenwood. Some were there when the questioning was done.'

'Who?'

'One's on the Board of Transportation, another is head of a political club in Flatbush. One ran for state senator a while back and lost by a hair. Two are big-business men—and I do mean big. They both are active in civic affairs.'

'Clyde has some fancy friends.'

'He can go higher than that if he wants to, Mike. He can go lower where the tougher ones are, too, if it's necessary. I've been poking around since I last saw you. I got interested in old Dinky Williams and began asking questions. There weren't too many answers. He goes high and he goes low. I can't figure it, but he's not a small-timer any more.'

I studied the ice in the glass a minute. 'I think, pal, that I can make him go so low he'll shake hands with the devil. Yeah; I think it's about time I had a talk with Clyde.'

'I don't know. I didn't turn around to look. It was bad enough sitting there hearing them talk about it. I . . . I started to get sick and I guess I cried a little. Ralph thought it was something he did to me and began pawing me to make up for it. I made him take me home. Mike . . . why didn't you call me?'

'I was busy, sugar. I had to explain all that to the cops.'

'You didn't shoot him, did you?'

'Only a little bit. Not enough to kill him. Somebody else did that.'

'Mike!'

I rocked her head and laughed at her. 'You got there early, didn't you?' Connie nodded Yes. 'Did you see Clyde at all during that time?'

'No . . . come to think of it, he didn't show up until after midnight.'

'How'd he look?'

Connie frowned and bit her thumb. Her eyes looked up into mine after a while and she grimaced. 'He seemed . . . strange. Nervous, sort of.'

Yes, he would seem nervous. Killing people leaves you like that sometimes. 'Did anyone else seem interested in the conversation? Like Clyde?'

'I don't think he heard about it. There was just those men.'

'Who else was there, Connie? Anybody that looked important?'

'Quit kidding? Everybody is important. You don't just walk into the Bowery Inn. Either you're pretty important or you're with somebody who is.'

I said, 'I got in and I'm a misfit.'

'Any beautiful model is better than the password,' she grinned.

'Don't tell me they have a password.'

'Clyde used to . . . to the back rooms. A password for each room. It's gotten so you don't need it now. That's what those little rooms are for between the larger rooms. They're sound-proof and they're lined with sheet steel.'

I tightened my fingers in her hair and pulled her head back so I could look into her face. 'You found out a lot in a hurry. The first time you were there was with me.'

'You told me I had brains, too, Mike. Have you forgotten already? While I sat on my fanny at the bar while Ralph gambled, the bartender and I had a very nice discussion. He told me all about the layout including the alarm and escape system. There are doors in the wall that go off with the alarm in case of a raid and the customers can beat it out the back. Isn't that nice of Clyde?'

'Not in the doorway, girl. People will talk.' She reached around behind me and slammed it shut. Then I gave her more. Her body writhed under my hands and I had to push her away to walk into the living-room.

She came in behind me and sat down at my feet. She looked more like a kid who hated to grow up than a woman. She was happy and she rubbed her cheek against my knees. 'I had a lousy time last night, Mike. I wish I could have gone with you.'

'Tell me about it.'

'We drank and danced and gambled. Ralph won over a thousand dollars then he lost it all back. Anton was there and if we had gone with him he wouldn't have lost it.'

'Was Anton alone again?'

'He was while he stayed sober. When he got a load on he began pinching all the girls and one slapped his face. I didn't blame her a bit. She didn't have anything on under the dress. Later he singled out Lillian Corbet—she works through the agency—and began making a pass at her in French. Oh, the things he was saying!'

'Did she slap him too?'

'She would have if she understood French. As it was the dawn began to break and she gave him the heave-ho. Anton thought it was all very funny so he switched back to English and started playing more games with Marion Lester. She didn't have any objections, the old bag.'

I reached down and ran my fingers through her hair. 'So Marion was there too?'

'You should have seen her switching her hips on the dance floor. She got Anton pretty well worked up and he isn't a man to work up easily. A guy about a half a head shorter than she was moved in on Anton and outplayed him by getting him soused even worse. Then he took Marion over and Anton invited everyone up to his place. What a time they must have had.'

'I bet. What did you do then?'

'Oh, some more gambling. I wasn't having much fun. Ralph would rather gamble than dance or drink any day. I sat and talked to the bartender until Ralph lost the money he had won, then we went back to a table and had a couple of champagne cocktails.'

Her head jerked up and that look came back on her face. 'That was when those men came in. They talked about the shooting and about Rainey and you. One said he read about you in the papers not so long ago and how you were just the type to do something like that and they started betting that the cops would have you before morning.'

'Who lost the bet?'

had sense enough to stop laughing and tell him my name and what day it was. The face lost its seriousness and smiled a little bit. 'You'll be all right,' it said. 'Had me a bit worried for a minute.' The head turned and spoke to somebody else. 'A slight concussion, that's all.'

The other voice said it was too bad it wasn't a fracture. I recognized the voice. In another minute, or two the face came into focus. It was the D.A. He had his hands in his coat pockets trying to look superior like a D.A. should look because there were people around.

I wormed into a sitting position and sent knives darting through my brain. The crowd was leaving now. The little man with the funny mouth, carrying his black bag, the two women with their hair in curlers, the super, the man and woman who seemed to be slightly sick. The others stayed. One had a navy-blue uniform with bright buttons, two wore cigars as part of their disguise. The D.A., of course. Then Pat. My pal. He was there, too, almost out of sight in the only chair still standing on its own legs.

The D.A. held out his palm and let me look at the two smashed pellets he was holding. Bullets. 'They were in the wall, Mr Hammer. I want an explanation. Now.'

One of the cigars helped me on my feet and I could see better. They all had faces with noses now. Before they had been just a blur. I didn't know I was grinning until the D.A. said, 'What's so funny? I don't see anything funny.'

'You wouldn't.'

It was too much for the bright boy. He reached out and grabbed me by the lapels of my coat and pushed his face into mine. Any other time I would have kicked his pants off for that. Right now I couldn't lift my hands.

'What's so funny, Hammer? How'd you like . . .'

I turned my head and spat. 'You got bad breath. Go 'way.'

He half threw me against the wall. I was still grinning. There was white about his nostrils and his mouth was a fine red line of hate. 'Talk!'

'Where's your warrant?' I demanded easily. 'Show me your warrant to come in my house and do that, then I'll talk, you yellow-bellied little bastard. I'm going to meet you in the street not long from now and carve that sissified pasty face of yours into ribbons. I'll be all right in a few minutes and you better be gone by then and your stooges with you. They're not cops. They're like you . . . with the guts of a bug and that's not a lot of guts. Go on, get out, you crummy hophead.'

The two detectives had to stop him from kicking me in the face. His legs, his knees, his whole body shook with coarse tremors. I'd never seen a guy as mad as he was. I hoped it'd be

'Very thoughtful.'

'I gave the hassock she was sitting on a push with my foot. Gotta go, sugar, gotta go.'

'Ah, Mike, not yet, please.'

'Look, I have things to do much as I'd like to sit here. Some place in this wild wild city there's a guy with a gun who's going to use it again. I want to be around when he tries.'

She tossed her hair like an angry cat and said, 'You're mean. I had something to show you, too.'

'Yeah?'

'Will you stay long enough to see it?'

'I guess I can.'

Connie stood up, kissed me lightly on the cheek and shoved me back in the chair. 'We're doing a series for a manufacturing house. Their newest number that they're going to advertise arrived today and I'm modelling it for a full-page, four-colour spread in the slick mags. When the job is done I get to keep it.'

She walked out of the room with long-legged strides and into the bedroom. She fussed around in there long enough for me to finish a cigarette. I had just squashed it out when she called out, 'Mike . . . come here.'

I pushed open the door of the bedroom and stood there feeling my skin go hot and cold then hot again. She was wearing a floor-length nightgown of the sheerest, most transparent white fabric I had ever seen. It wasn't the way the ad. would be taken. Then the lights would be in front of her. The one in the room was behind her and she didn't have anything on under it.

When she turned the fabric floated out in a billowy cloud and she smiled into my eyes with a look that meant more than words.

The front of it was wide open.

'Like me, Mike?'

My forefinger moved, telling her to come closer. She floated across the room and stood in front of me, challenging me with her body. I said, 'Take it off.'

All she did was shrug her shoulders. The gown dropped to the floor.

I looked at her, storing up a picture in my mind that I could never forget. She could have been a statue standing there, a statue moulded of creamy white flesh that breathed with an irregular rhythm. A statue with dark, blazing eyes that spoke of the passion that lay within. A statue that stood in a daring pose that made you want to reach out to touch and pull so close the fire would engulf you too.

The statue had a voice that was low and desiring. 'I could love you so easily, Mike.'

'Don't,' I said.

books Wheeler is still a suicide and we'd be bucking a lot of opposition to make it look different.'

I was looking at my hand where my thumb and forefinger pinched together. I was still holding a tiny piece of fabric. I held it out to him. 'Whoever he was left a hunk of his coat on my fingernail. You're a specialist. Let the sciences of your lab. work that over.'

Pat took it from my fingers and examined it closely. When he finished he pulled an envelope from his pocket and dropped it in. I said, 'He was a strong guy if ever I met one. He had a coat on and I couldn't tell if he was just wiry-strong or muscle-strong, but one thing for sure, he was a powerhouse.'

'Remember what you said, Pat . . . about Wheeler having been in a scuffle before he died? I've been thinking about it. Suppose this guy was tailing Wheeler and walked into the room. He figured Wheeler would be in bed, but instead he was up going to the bathroom or something. He figured to kill Wheeler with his hands and let it look like we had a drunken brawl. Because Wheeler was up it changed his plans. Wheeler saw what was going to happen and made a grab for my gun that was hanging on the chair.'

'Picture it, Pat. Wheeler with the gun . . . the guy knocks it aside as he fires and the slug hits the bed. Then the guy forces the gun against Wheeler's head and it goes off. A scrap like that would make the same kind of marks on his body, wouldn't it?'

Pat didn't say anything. His head was slanted a little and he was going back again, putting all the pieces in their places. When they set just right he nodded. 'Yes, it would at that.' His eyes narrowed. 'Then the killer picked up one empty shell and dug the slug out of the mattress. A hole as small as it left wouldn't have been noticed anyway. It would have been clean as a whistle if you didn't know how many slugs were left in the rod. It would have been so pretty that even you would have been convinced.'

'Verily,' I said.

'It's smooth, Mike. Lord, but it's smooth. It puts you on the spot because you were the only one looking for a murderer. Everyone else was satisfied with a suicide verdict.' He paused and frowned, staring at the window. 'If only that damn hotel had some system about it . . . even a chambermaid with sense enough to keep on her toes; but no. The killer walks out in the hall and drops his slug and shell that we find hours later.'

'He was wearing an old suit.'

'What?'

'It must have been old if it had a hole in the pockets.'

Pat looked at me and the frown deepened. His hand fished

glared at him through the smoke. 'You know, Pat, you can sit around for a month in a room with a hornet, waiting for him to sting you. But if you go poke at his nest it'll only be a second before you're bit.'

'They say if you get bitten often enough it'll kill you.'

I stood up and tugged my coat on. 'You might at that. What are your plans for the rest of the evening?'

Pat waited for me by the door while I hunted up my hat. 'Since you've gotten my schedule all screwed up I have to clean up some work at the office. Besides, I want to find out if Rainey's two pals have been found yet. You know, you called it pretty good. They both disappeared so fast it would make your head swim.'

'What did they do about the arena?'

'They sold out . . . to a man who signed the contracts and deeds as Robert Hobart Williams.'

'Dinky . . . Clyde! I'll be damned.'

'Yeah, me too. He bought it for a song. Ed Cooper ran it in the sports column of the *Globe* tonight with all the nasty implications.'

'I'll be damned,' I said again. 'It tied Rainey in very nicely with Clyde, didn't it?'

Pat shrugged. 'Who can prove it? Rainey's dead and the partners are missing. That isn't the only arena Clyde owns. It now appears that he's a man quite interested in sporting establishments.'

We started out the door and I almost forgot what I came for. Pat waited in the hall while I went back to the bedroom and pulled out the dresser drawer. The Luger was still there, wrapped in an oily rag inside a box. I checked the clip, jacked a shell into the chamber and put it in half-cock.

When I slid it into the holster it fitted loosely, but nice I felt a lot better.

The snow, the damned snow. It slowed me to a crawl and did all but stop me. It still came down in lazy fashion, but so thick you couldn't see fifty feet through it. Traffic was thick, sluggish, and people were abandoning their cars in the road for the subway. I circled around them, following the cab in front of me and finally hit a section that had been cleared only minutes before.

That stretch kept me from missing Velda. She had her coat and hat on and was locking the door when I stepped out of the elevator. I didn't have to tell her to open up again.

When she threw her coat on top of mine I looked at her and got mad again. She was more lovely than the last time I said, 'Where you going?'

and weird discord. My mouth worked to get the words out, but they stuck fast to the roof of my mouth.

I shook my head to break up the crazy symphony going on in my brain and I mumbled, 'No . . . no. Oh, good God, I can't, Velda, I can't.'

I knew what the feeling was. I was scared. Scared to death and it showed in my face and the way I stumbled across the room to a chair and sat down. Velda knelt on the floor in front of me, her face a fuzzy white blur that kissed me again and again. I could feel her hands in my hair and smell the pleasant woman smell of cleanliness, of beauty that was part of her; but the music wouldn't go away.

She asked me what had happened and I told her. It wasn't that. It was something else. She wanted to know what it was, demanded to know what it was and her voice came through a sob and tears. She gave me back my voice and I said, 'Not you, kid . . . no kiss of death for you. There've been two women now. I said I loved them both. I thought I did. They both died—but not you, kid.'

Her hands on mine were soft and gentle, 'Mike . . . nothing will happen to me.'

My mind went back over the years—to Charlotte and Lola.

'It's no good, Velda. Maybe when this is all over it'll be different. I keep thinking of the women who died. God, if I ever have to hold a gun on a woman again I'll die first, so help me I will. How many years has it been since the yellow-gold hair and the beautiful face was there? It's still there and I know it's dead, but I keep hearing the voice. And I keep thinking of the dark hair too . . . like a shroud. Gold shrouds, dark shrouds. . . .'

'Mike . . . don't. Please, for me. Don't . . . no more.'

She had another drink in my hand and I poured it down, heard the wild fury of the music drown out and give me back to myself again. I said, 'All over now, sugar. Thanks.' She was smiling, but her face was wet with tears. I kissed her eyes and the top of her head. 'When this is settled we'll take a vacation, that's what we'll do. We'll take all the cash out of the bank and see what the city looks like when there's not murder in it.'

She left me sitting there smoking a cigarette while she went into the bathroom and washed her face. I sat there and didn't think of anything at all, trying to put a cap over the raw edges of my nerves that had been scraped and pounded too often.

Velda came back, a vision in a tailored grey suit that accentuated every curve. She was so big, so damn big and so lovely. She had the prettiest legs in the world and there wasn't a thing about her that wasn't beautiful and desirable. I could see why

'Good night, Mike.'

'Night, Velda.'

She smiled again and closed the door behind her. I heard the elevator door open and shut and if I had had Clyde in my hands I would have squeezed him until his insides ran all over the floor. Even my cigarette tasted lousy. I picked up the phone and called Connie. She wasn't home. I tried Juno and was ready to hang up when she answered.

I said, 'This is Mike, Juno. It's late, but I was wondering if you were busy.'

'No, Mike, not at all. Won't you come up?'

'I'd like to.'

'And I'd like you to. Hurry, Mike.'

Hurry? When she talked like that I could fly across town.

There was an odd familiarity about Juno's place. It bothered me until I realized that it was familiar because I had been thinking about it. I had been there a dozen times before in my mind, but none of the eagerness was gone as I pushed the bell. Excitement came even with the thought of her, a tingling thrill that spoke of greater pleasures yet to come.

The door clicked and I pushed it open to walk into the lobby. She met me at the door of Olympus, a smiling, beautiful goddess in a long, hostess coat of some iridescent material that changed colour with every motion of her body.

'I always come back, don't I, Juno?'

Her eyes melted into the same radiant colour as the coat. 'I've been waiting for you.'

It was only the radio playing, but it might have been a chorus of angels singing to form a background of splendour. Juno had prepared Olympus for me, arranging it so a mortal might be tempted into leaving Earth. The only lights were those of the long waxy tapers that flickered in a dancing yellow light, throwing wavy shadows on the wall. The table had been drawn up in the living-room and set with delicate china, arranged so that we would be seated close enough to want to be closer, too close to talk or eat without feeling things catch in your throat.

We spoke of the little things, forgetting all the unpleasantness of the past few days. We spoke of things and thought of things we didn't speak of, knowing it was there whenever we were ready. We ate, but the taste of the food was lost to me when I'd look at her in that sweeping gown that laughed and danced in the rising and falling of the lights. The cuffs of her sleeves were huge things that rose halfway to her elbows, leaving only her hands visible. Beautiful, large hands that were eloquent in movement.

Clyde wanted her. Who wouldn't? I was a sap for waiting as long as I had.

She took the cigarette from my mouth and put it in her own. 'I'm going to see Clyde tonight, Mike. I've been wondering about several things and I want to see if I can find out what they are.'

'What things?' There wasn't much interest in my words.

She took a drag on the cigarette and handed it back. 'Things like what it is he holds over people's heads. Things like blackmail. Things like how Clyde can influence people so powerful they can make or break judges, mayors or even governors. What kind of blackmail can that be?'

'Keep talking, Velda.'

'He had conferences with these big people. They call him up at odd hours. They're never asking . . . they're always giving. To Clyde. He takes it like it's his due. I want to know those things.'

'Will they be found in Clyde's apartment, baby?'

'No. Clyde has them . . .' she tapped her forehead, 'here. He isn't smart enough to keep them there.'

'Be careful, Velda, be damn careful with that guy. He might not be the pushover you think he is. He's got connexions and he keeps his nose too damn clean to be a pushover. Watch yourself.'

She smiled at me and pulled on her gloves. 'I'll watch myself. If he goes too far I'll take a note from that Anton Lipsek's book and call him something in French.'

'You can't speak French.'

'Neither can Clyde. That's what makes him so mad. Anton calls him things in French and laughs about it. Clyde gets red in the face, but that's all.'

I didn't get it and I told her so. 'Clyde isn't one to take any junk from a guy like Anton. It's a wonder he doesn't stick one of his boys on 'im.'

'He doesn't, though. He takes it and gets mad. Maybe Anton has something on him.'

'I can picture that,' I said. 'Still, those things happen.'

She pulled on her coat and looked at herself in the mirror. It wasn't necessary; you can't improve on perfection. I knew what it was like to be jealous again and tore my eyes away. When she was satisfied with herself she bent over and kissed me. 'Why don't you stay here tonight, Mike?'

'Now you ask me.'

She laughed, a rich, throaty laugh and kissed me again. 'I'll shoo you out when I get in. I may be late, but my virtue will still be intact.'

'It had damn well better be.'

by the arm and heard her laugh again because she knew what was going on inside me and wanted it that way.

'Quit it, Juno. Damn it, quit fooling around. You make me think I want you and I lose sight of everything else. Cut it out.'

'No.' She drew the word out. Her eyes were half closed. 'It's me that wants *you*, Mike. I'll do what I can to get you. I won't stop. There's never been anyone else like you.'

'Later.'

'Now.'

It might have been now, but the light caught her hair again. Yellow candlelight that changed its colour to the gold I hated. I didn't wait to have it happen to me. I shoved her on the couch and reached for the decanter in the bar set. She lay there languidly, waiting for me to come to her and I fought it and fought it until my mind was my own again and I could laugh a little bit myself.

She saw it happen and smiled gently. 'You're even better than I thought,' she said. 'You're a man with the instincts of some jungle animal. It has to be when *you* say so, doesn't it?'

I threw the drink down fast. 'Not before,' I told her.

'I like that about you, too, Mike.'

'So do I. It keeps me out of trouble.' When I filled the glass I balanced it in my hand and sat on the arm of the couch facing her. 'Do you know much about me, Juno?'

'A little. I've been hearing things.' She picked one of her long cigarettes out of the box and lit it. Smoke streamed up lazily from her mouth. 'Why?'

'I'll tell you why I'm like I am. I'm a detective. In spirit only, now, but I used to have a ticket and a gun. They took it away because I was with Chester Wheeler when he used my gun to commit suicide. That was wrong, because Chester Wheeler was murdered. A guy named Rainey was murdered too. Two killings and a lot of scared people. The one you know as Clyde is a former punk named Dinky Williams and he's gotten to be so big nobody can lay a finger on him, so big he can dictate to the dictators.

'That isn't the end of it, either. Somebody wants me out of the way so badly they made a try on the street and again in my apartment. In between they tried to lay Rainey's killing at my feet so I'd get picked up for it. All that . . . because one guy named Chester Wheeler was found dead in a hotel room. Pretty, isn't it?'

It was too much for her to understand at once. She bit her thumbnail and a frown crept across her face. 'Mike . . .'

'I know it's complicated,' I said. 'Murder generally is complicated. It's so damn complicated that I'm the only one

There was a cocktail instead of coffee, a toast to the night ahead, then she rose, and with her arm in mine, the short wisps of her hair brushing my face, took me into the library.

Cigarettes were there, the bar set was pulled out and ice frosted a crystal bowl. I put my crumpled pack of Luckies alongside the silver cigarette-box to remind me that I was still a mortal, took one and lit it from the lighter she held out to me.

'Like it, Mike?'

'Wonderful.'

'It was special, you know. I've been home every minute since I saw you last, waiting for you to come back.'

She sat next to me on the couch and leaned back, her head resting on the cushion. Her eyes were beginning to invite me now. 'I've been busy, goddess. Things have been happening.'

'Things?'

'Business.'

One of her fingers touched the bruise on the side of my jaw. 'How'd you get that, Mike?'

'Business.'

She started to laugh, then saw the seriousness in my face. 'But how . . .'

'It makes nasty conversation, Juno. Some other time I'll tell you about it.'

'All right, Mike.' She put her cigarette down on the table and grabbed my hand. 'Dance with me, Mike?' She made my name sound like it was something special.

Her body was warm and supple, the music alive with rhythm, and together we threw a whirling pattern of shadows that swayed and swung with every subtle note. She stood back from me, just far enough so we could look at each other and read things into every expression. I could only stand it so long and I tried to pull her closer, but she laughed a little song and twisted in a graceful pirouette that sent the gown out and up around her legs.

The music stopped then, ending on a low note that was the cue to a slow waltz. Juno floated back into my arms and I shook my head. It had been enough . . . too much. The suggestion she had put into the dance left me shaking from head to foot, a sensation born of something entirely new, something I had never felt. Not the primitive animal reflex I was used to, not the passion that made you want to squeeze or bite or demand what you want and get it even if you have to fight for it. It made me mad because I didn't know what it was and I didn't like it, this custom of the gods.

So I shook my head again, harder this time. I grabbed her

again I couldn't understand and it snaked up my back and my hands started to jerk unconsciously with it.

I picked up my butts and winked good night. The look she sent me made my spine crawl again. I walked out and found my car half buried in a drift and drove back the street of lights where I parked and checked into a hotel for a long winter's nap.

looking for a murderer. All the others are content to let it rest as suicide . . . except Rainey, of course. That job was a dilly.'

'That's awful, Mike! I never realized . . .'

'It isn't over yet. I have a couple of ideas sticking pins in my brain right now. Some of the pieces are trying to fit together, trying hard. I've been up too long and been through too much to think straight. I thought that I might relax if I came up here to see you.' I grinned at her. 'You weren't any help at all. You'll probably even spoil my dreams.'

'I hope I do,' she said impishly.

'I'm going some place and sleep it off,' I said. 'I'm going to let the clock go all the way around, then maybe once more before I stir out of my sack. Then I'm going to put all the pieces together and find me a killer. The bastard is strong . . . strong enough to twist a gun around in Wheeler's hand and make him blow his brains out. He's strong enough to take me on in my own joint and nearly finish it for me. The next time will be different. I'll be ready and I'll choke the son-of-a-bitch to death.'

'Will you come back when it's over, Mike?'

I put on my hat and looked down at her. She looked so damn desirable and agreeable I wanted to stay. I said, 'I'll be back, Juno. You can dance for me again . . . all by yourself. I'll sit down and watch you dance and you can show me how you have fun on Olympus. I'm getting a little tired of being a mortal.'

'I'll dance for you, Mike. I'll show you things you never saw before. You'll like Olympus. It's different up there and there's nothing like it on this earth. We'll have a mountain-top all to ourselves and I'll make you want to stay there for ever.'

'It'd take a good woman to make me stay anywhere very long.'

Her tongue flicked out and left her lips glistening wetly, reflecting the desire in her eyes. Her body seemed to move, squirm, so the sheen of the house-coat threw back the lithe contours of her body, vivid in detail. 'I could,' she said.

She was asking me now. Demanding that I come to her for even a moment and rip that damn robe right off her back and see what it was that went to make up the flesh of a goddess. For one second my face must have changed and she thought I was going to do it, because her eyes went wide and I saw her shoulders twitch and this time there was woman-fear behind the desire and she was a mortal for an instant, a female crouching away from the male. But that wasn't what made me stop. My face went the way it did because there was something else

and told them not to disturb me until I woke up. What happened with you and Clyde? Did you learn anything?

She choked back a sob and my hand tightened around the receiver. Clyde was dying right then. 'Mike . . .'

'Go on, Velda.' I didn't want to hear it but I had to.

'He almost . . . did.'

I let the phone go and breathed easier. Clyde had a few minutes left to live. 'Tell me,' I said.

'He wants me in the worst way, Mike. I—I played a game with him and I was almost sorry for it. If I hadn't gotten him too drunk . . . he would have . . . but I made him wait. He got drunk and he told me . . . bragged to me about his position in life. He said he could run the city and he meant it. He said things that were meant to impress me and I acted impressed. Mike . . . he's blackmailing some of the biggest men in town. It's all got to do with the Bowery Inn.'

'Do you know what it is?'

'Not yet, Mike. He thinks . . . I'm the perfect partner for him. He said he'd tell me all about it if . . . if I . . . oh, Mike, what shall I do? What shall I do? I hate that man . . . and I don't know what to do!'

'The lousy bastard!'

'Mike . . . he gave me a key to his apartment. I'm going up there tonight. He's going to tell me about it then . . . and make arrangements to take me in with him. He wants me, Mike.'

A rat might have been gnawing at my intestines. 'Shut up! Damn it, you aren't going to do anything!'

I heard her sob again and I wanted to rip the phone right off the wall. I could barely hear her with the pounding of the blood in my head. 'I have to go, Mike. We'll know for sure then.'

'No!'

'Mike . . . please don't try to stop me. It isn't nearly as . . . serious as what you've done. I'm not getting shot at . . . I'm not giving my life. I'm trying to give what I can, just like you . . . because it's important. I'm going to his apartment at midnight and then we'll know, Mike. It won't take long after that.'

She didn't hear me shout into the phone because she had hung up. There was no stopping her. She knew I might try to, and would be gone before I could reach her.

Midnight. Three hours. That's all the time I had.

It wasn't so funny any more.

I felt in my pocket for another nickel and dialled Pat's number. He wasn't home so I tried the office and got him. I told him it was me without giving my name and he cut me off with a curt hello and said he'd be in the usual bar in ten

CHAPTER TEN

I SLEPT the sleep of the dead, but the dead weren't disturbed by dreams of the living. I slept and I talked, hearing my own voice in the stillness. The voice asked questions, demanded answers that couldn't be given and turned into a spasm of rage. Faces came to me, drifting by in a ghostly procession, laughing with all the fury the dead could command, bringing with their laughter that weird, crazy music that beat and beat and beat, trying to drive my senses to the farthestmost part of my brain from which they could never return. My voice shouted for it to stop and was drowned in the sea of laughter. Always those faces. Always that one face with the golden hair, hair so intensely brilliant it was almost white. The voice I tried to scream with was only a hoarse, muted whisper saying, 'Charlotte, Charlotte . . . I'll kill you again if I have to! I'll kill you again, Charlotte!' And the music increased in tempo and volume, pounding and beating and vibrating with such insistence that I began to fall before it. The face with the golden hair laughed anew and urged the music on. Then there was another face, one with hair a raven-black, darker than the darkness of the pit. A face with clean beauty and a strength to face even the dead. It challenged the golden hair and the music, commanding it to stop, to disappear for ever. And it did. I heard my voice again saying over and over, 'Velda, thank God! Velda, Velda, Velda.'

I awoke and the room was still. My watch had stopped and no light filtered in under the shade. When I looked out the sky was black, pinpointed with the lights of the stars that reflected themselves from the snow-covered street below.

I picked up the phone and the desk answered. I said, 'This is Hammer in 541. What time is it?'

The clerk paused, then answered, 'Five minutes to nine, sir.'

I said thanks and hung up. The clock had come mighty close to going around twice at that. It didn't take me more than ten minutes to get dressed and checked out. In the restaurant that adjoined the hotel I ate like I was famished, took time for a slow smoke and called Velda. My hand trembled while I waited for her to answer.

I said, 'Hello, honey, it's Mike.'

'Oh . . . Mike, where have you been? I've been frantic!'

'You can relax, girl. I've been asleep. I checked into a hotel'

told me to sit in the car and stay there until he got out. I promised him I'd be a good boy and watched him cross the street.

He took too long. I began to fidget with the wheel and chain-smoked through my pack of butts. When I was on the last one I got out myself and headed towards the saloon on the corner. It was a hell of a dive, typically waterfront and reeking with all the assorted odours you could think of. I put a quarter in the cigarette machine, grabbed my fresh deck and ordered a beer at the bar. Two guys came in and started talking about the suicide across the street.

One was on the subject of her legs and the other took it up. Then they started on the other parts of her anatomy until the bartender said, 'Jeez, cut it out, will ya! Like a couple of ghouls ya sound. Can the crap.'

The guy who liked the legs fought for his rights supported by the other one and the bartender threw them both out and put their change in his pockets. He turned to me and said, 'Ever see anythin' like that? Jeez, the dame's dead, what do they want of her now? What ghouls!'

I nodded agreement and finished my beer. Every two minutes I'd check my watch and find it two minutes later and start cursing a slimy little bastard named Clyde.

Then the beer would taste flat.

I took it as long as I could and got the hell out of the saloon and crossed the street to see what was taking Pat so long. There was a handful of people grouped around the body and the ambulance was gone. The car from the morgue had taken its place. Pat was bending over the body looking for identification without any success and had the light flashed on her face.

He handed one of the cops a note he fished out of her pocket and the cop scowled. He read, 'He left me.' He scowled some more and Pat looked up at him. 'That's all, Captain. No signature, no name. That's all it says.'

Pat scowled too and I looked at her face again.

The boys from the morgue wagon moved in and hoisted the body into a basket. Pat told them to put it in the unidentified file until they found out who she was.

I had a last look at her face.

When the wagon pulled away the crowd started to break up and I wandered off into the shadows that lined the street. The face. the face. Pale white to the point of transparency, eyes closed and lips slightly parted. I stood leaning up against a plank wall staring at the night, hearing the cars and the trolley rattle across the bridge, hearing the cacophony of noises that go to make up the voice of the city.

I kept thinking of that face.

minutes if I wanted to see him. The receiver clicked in my ear as he hung up. I stood there and looked at the phone stupidly.

The usual bar was a little place downtown where I had met him several times in the past and I went there now. I double-parked and slid out in front of the place to look in the windows, then I heard, 'Mike . . . Mike!'

I turned around and Pat was waving me into my car and I ran back and got in under the wheel. 'What the hell's going on with you, Pat?'

'Keep quiet and get away from here. I think there's been an ear on my phone and I may have been followed.'

'The D.A.'s boys?'

'Yeah, and they're within their rights. I stopped being a cop when I lied for you. I deserve any kind of an investigation they want to give me.'

'But why all the secrecy?'

Pat looked at me quickly, then away. 'You're wanted for murder. There's a warrant out for your arrest. The D.A. has found himself another witness to replace the couple he lost.'

'Who?'

'A local character from Glenwood. He picked you out of the picture file and definitely established that you were there that night. He sells tickets at the arena as a sideline.'

'Which puts you in a rosy red light,' I said.

Pat muttered, 'Yeah. I must look great.'

We drove on around the block and on to Broadway. 'Where to?' I asked.

'Over to the Brooklyn Bridge. A girl pulled the Dutch act and I have to check it myself. Orders from the D.A. through higher headquarters. He's trying to make my life miserable by pulling me out on everything that has a morgue tag attached to it. The crumb hopes I slip up somewhere and when I do I've had it. Maybe I've had it already. He's checked my movements the night I was supposed to have been with you and is getting ready to pull out the stops.'

'Maybe we'll be cellmates,' I said.

'Ah, pipe down.'

'Or you can work in my grocery store . . . while I'm serving time, that is.'

He said, 'Shut up. What've you got to be cheerful about?'

My teeth were clamped together, but I could still grin. 'Plenty, kid. I got plenty to be cheerful about. Soon a killer will be killed. I can feel it coming.'

Pat sat there staring straight ahead. He sat that way until we reached the cutoff under the bridge and pulled over to the kerb. There was a squad car and an ambulance at the wharf side and another squad car pulling up when Pat got out. He

in a hurry. Pat got that grim look, muttered something nasty and started across the street to where I was supposed to be.

I angled over and met him. 'Nice corpse,' I said.

'I thought I told you to stay in the car. Those cops have you on their list.'

'So what? I'm on a lot of lists these days. What about the girl?'

'Unidentified. Probably a lovers' quarrel. She had a couple of broken ribs and a broken neck. She was dead before she hit the water.'

'And the note . . . did the lover stuff that in her pocket before he threw her overboard?'

'You have big ears. Yes, that's what it looks like. They probably argued previously, he invited her for a walk, then gave it to her.'

'Strong guy to mess her up like that, no?'

Pat nodded. I opened the door and he got in, sliding over so I could get behind the wheel. 'He had to be to break her ribs.'

'Very strong,' I mused. 'I'm not a weak sister myself and I know what it's like to come up against one of those strong bastards.' I sat there and watched him.

A look of incredulity came over his face. 'Now wait a minute. We're on two different subjects, feller. Don't try to tell me that he was the same . . .'

'Know who she was, Pat?'

'I told you she was unidentified at present. She had no handbag, but we'll trace her from her clothes.'

'That takes time.'

'Know a better way?'

'Yeah,' I said. 'As a matter of fact I do.' I reached behind the seat and dragged out an envelope. It was crammed with pictures and I dumped them into my lap. Pat reached up and turned on the overhead light. I shuffled through them and brought out the one I was looking for.

Pat looked a little sick. He glanced at me then back to the picture. 'Her name is Jean Trotter, Pat. She's a model at Anton Lipsek's agency. Several days ago she eloped.'

I thought he'd never stop swearing. He fanned out the pictures in his hand and squinted at them with eyes that blazed hot as the fires of hell. 'Pictures! Pictures! Goddamn it, Mike, what are we up against? Do you know what that burned stuff was that you found in Emil Perry's house?'

I shook my head.

'Pictures!' he exploded. 'A whole mess of burned photographs that didn't show a thing!'

The steering-wheel started to bend under my fingers. I

A taxi screamed past and slid to a stop at the corner. I backed up and a short fat figure, speaking in guttural English, shoved some bills in the driver's hand and ran to the squad cars. He spoke to the cop, his arms gesticulating wildly; the cop took him to Pat and he went through the same thing again.

The crowd that had turned away turned back again and I went with them, hanging on the outside, yet close enough so I could hear the little fat man. Pat stopped him, made him start over, telling him to calm down first.

The fat man nodded and took the cigarette that was offered him, but didn't put it in his mouth. 'The boat captain I am, you see?' he said. 'The barges I am captain of. We go by two hours ago under the bridge and it is so quiet and peaceful then I sit on the deckhouse and watch the sky. Always I look up at the bridge when I go by. With my night-glasses I look up to see the automobiles and marvel at such things as we have in this country.

'I see her then, you understand? She is standing there fighting and I hear her scream even. She fights this man who holds his hand over her mouth and she can't scream. I see all this, you understand, yet I am not able to move or do a thing. On the barge we have nothing but the megaphone to call with. It happens so fast. He lifts her up and over she goes into the river. First I thought she hit the last barge on the string and I run and shout quickly, but it is not so. I must wait so long until I can get somebody to take me off the barge, then I call the police.

'The policeman, he told me here to come. You were here. The girl has already been found. That is what I have come to tell you. Understand?'

Pat said, 'I understand all right. You saw this man, she fought?'

The guy bobbed his head vigorously.

'Could you identify him?'

Everyone's eyes were on the little guy. He lifted his hands out and shrugged. 'I could tell him from someone else . . . no. He had on a hat, a coat. He lifted the girl up and over she goes. No, I do not see his face for I am too excited. Even through the night-glasses I could not see all that so well.'

Pat turned to the cop next to him. 'Take his name and address. We'll need a statement on it.'

The cop whipped out a pad and began taking it down. Pat prompted him with questions until the whole thing was straight then dismissed the batch of them and started asking around for other witnesses. The motley group hanging around watching didn't feel like having any personal dealings with the police department for any reason at all and broke up

that her nephew Charles was responsible for this theft," went on Poirot.

"Yes."

"Although there was no particular evidence to show who actually took the money?"

"Oh, but it must have been Charles! Mrs. Tanios wouldn't do such a thing, and her husband was quite a stranger and wouldn't have known where the money was kept—neither of them would. And I don't think Theresa Arundell would dream of such a thing. She's got plenty of money and always so beautifully dressed."

"It might have been one of the servants," Poirot suggested.

Miss Lawson seemed horrified by the idea.

"Oh, no, indeed, neither Ellen nor Annie would have dreamed of such a thing. They are both *most* superior women and *absolutely honest*, I am sure."

Poirot waited a minute or two. Then he said :

"I wonder if you can give me any idea—I am sure you can, for if any one possessed Miss Arundell's confidence you did—"

Miss Lawson murmured confusedly :

"Oh, I don't know about that, I'm sure—" But she was clearly flattered.

"I feel that you will be able to help me."

"Oh, I'm sure, if I can—anything I can do—"

Poirot went on :

"This is in confidence—"

A sort of owlish expression appeared on Miss Lawson's face. The magical words "in confidence" seemed to be a kind of Open sesame.

"Have you any idea of the reason which caused Miss Arundell to alter her will?"

"Her will? Oh—her will?"

Miss Lawson seemed slightly taken aback.

Poirot said, watching her closely :

"It is true, is it not, that she made a new will shortly before her death, leaving all her fortune to you?"

"Yes, but I knew nothing about it. Nothing at all."

jammed my foot on the starter and roared away from the kerb. Pat looked at the picture again in the light of the dash. His breath was coming fast. 'We can make it official now. I'll get the whole department on it if I have to. Give me a week and we'll have that guy ready to face a murder trial.'

I glowered back at him. 'Week, hell!—all we have is a couple of hours. Did you trace that piece of fabric I gave you?'

'Sure, we traced it all right. We found the store it came from . . . over a year ago. It was from a damn good suit the owner remembered selling, but the guy had no recollection for faces. It was a cash transaction and he didn't have a record of the size or any names and addresses. Our killer is one smart Joe.'

'He'll trip up. They all do.'

I cut in and out of the traffic, my foot heavy on the accelerator. On the main drag I was lucky enough to make the lights and didn't have to stop until I was in front of the Municipal Building. I said, 'Pat, use your badge and check the marriage bureau for Jean Trotter's certificate. Find out who she eloped with and where she was married. Since I can't show my nose you'll have to do this on your own.'

He started out of the car and I handed him the photograph. 'Take this along in case you have to brighten up a memory or two.'

'Where'll you be?'

I looked at my watch. 'First I'm going to see what I can get on the girl myself. Then I'm going to stop a seduction scene before it starts.'

Pat was still trying to figure that one out when I drove off. I looked in the rear-vision mirror and saw him pocket the photograph and walk away up the street.

I stopped at the first drugstore I came to and had a quarter changed into nickels, then pushed a guy out of the way who was getting into the booth. He was going to argue about it until he saw my face then he changed his mind and went looking for another phone. I dropped the coin in and dialled Juno's number. I was over-anxious and got the wrong number. The second time I hit it right, but I didn't get to speak to Juno. Her phone was connected to one of those service outfits that take messages and a girl told me that Miss Reeves was out, but expected home shortly. I said no. I didn't want to leave a message and hung up.

I threw in another nickel and spun the dial. Connie was home. She would be glad to see me no matter what the hour was. My voice had a rasp to it and she said, 'Anything wrong, Mike?'

'Plenty. I'll tell you about it when I get there.'

Just for a moment I fancied a flicker of some quite different expression showed itself in Miss Lawson's dull, pale blue eyes. I imagined that, just for a moment, a shrewd, intelligent woman sat there instead of an amiable, foolish one.

She said with a little laugh :

"Well—of course, there is the other side of it too.... I mean there are two sides to every question. What I say is, Miss Arundell meant me to have the money. I mean if I didn't take it I should be going against her *wishes*. And that wouldn't be right either, would it?"

"It is a difficult question," said Poirot, shaking his head.

"Yes, indeed, I have worried over it a great deal. Mrs. Tanios—Bella—she is such a nice woman—and those dear little children! I mean, I feel sure Miss Arundell wouldn't have wanted her to—I feel, you see, that dear Miss Arundell intended me to use my *discretion*. She didn't want to leave any money *outright* to Bella because she was afraid that man would get hold of it."

"What man?"

"Her husband. You know, Mr. Poirot, the poor girl is *quite* under his thumb. She does *anything* he tells her. I dare say she'd *murder* some one if he told her to! And she's afraid of him. I'm quite sure she's afraid of him. I've seen her look simply *terrified* once or twice. Now that isn't right, Mr. Poirot—you can't say that's right."

Poirot did not say so. Instead he inquired :

"What sort of man is Dr. Tanios?"

"Well," said Miss Lawson hesitatingly, "he's a very pleasant man."

She stopped doubtfully.

"But you don't trust him?"

"Well—no, I don't. I don't know," went on Miss Lawson doubtfully, "that I'd trust *any* man very much! Such *dreadful* things one hears! And all their *poor* wives go through! It's really terrible! Of course, Dr. Tanios pretends to be very fond of his wife and he's quite charming to her. His manners are really *delightful*. But

Miss Lawson was shrill in protest. "It was the *greatest* surprise to me! A *wonderful* surprise, of course! So good of dear Miss Arundell. And she never even gave me a *hint*. Not the smallest hint! I was so taken aback, when Mr. Purvis read it out, I didn't know where to look, or whether to laugh or cry! I assure you, Mr. Poirot, the *shock* of it—the *shock*, you know. The *kindness*—the wonderful kindness of dear Miss Arundell. Of course, I'd hoped, perhaps, for just a little something—perhaps just a teeny, teeny legacy—though of course there was no *reason* she should have left me even that. I'd not been with her so very long. But this—it was like—it was like a fairy story! Even now I can't quite believe in it, if you know what I mean. And sometimes—well, sometimes—I don't feel altogether comfortable about it. I mean—well, I mean—"

She knocked off her pince-nez, picked them up, fumbled with them and went on even more incoherently :

"Sometimes I feel that—well, flesh and blood is flesh and blood after all, and I don't feel quite comfortable at Miss Arundell's leaving all her money away from her family. I mean, it doesn't seem *right*, does it? Not *all* of it. Such a *large* fortune, too! Nobody had any *idea*! But—well—it does make one feel uncomfortable—and every one saying things, you know—and I'm sure I've never been an *ill-natured* woman! I mean I wouldn't have dreamed of influencing Miss Arundell in any way! And it's not as though I could, either. Truth to tell, I was always just a teeny weeny bit afraid of her! She was so *sharp*, you know, so inclined to *jump* on you. And quite rude sometimes! 'Don't be a downright fool,' she'd snap. And really, after all, I had my feelings and sometimes I'd feel quite upset.... And then to find out that all the time she'd really been fond of me—well, it was very wonderful, wasn't it? Only of course, as I say, there's been a lot of *unkindness*, and really in some ways one feels—I mean, well, it does seem a little *hard*, doesn't it, on some people?"

"You mean that you would prefer to relinquish the money?" asked Poirot.

"You were in the room at the time?"

"Not exactly in the room," said Miss Lawson after a momentary pause.

"Quite, quite," said Poirot hastily. "And Charles, what did he say to that?"

"He said : 'Don't be too sure.' "

Poirot said slowly :

"Did Miss Arundell take this threat seriously? "

"Well, I don't know.... She didn't say anything to me about it.... But then she wouldn't do that, anyway."

Poirot said quietly :

"You knew, of course, that Miss Arundell was making a new will?"

"No, no. I've told you, it was a complete surprise. I never dreamt—"

Poirot interrupted.

"You did not know the *contents*. But you knew the *fact*—that there *was* a will being made?"

"Well—I suspected—I mean her sending for the lawyer when she was laid up—"

"Exactly. That was after she had a fall, was it not?"

"Yes, Bob—Bob was the dog—he had left his ball at the top of the stairs—and she tripped over it and fell."

"A nasty accident."

"Oh, yes; why, she might easily have broken her leg or her arm. The doctor said so."

"She might quite easily have been killed."

"Yes, indeed."

Her answer seemed quite natural and frank.

Poirot said, smiling :

"I think I saw Master Bob at Littlegreen House."

"Oh, yes, I expect you did. He's a dear little doggie."

Nothing annoys me more than to hear a sporting terrier called a dear little doggie. No wonder, I thought, that Bob despised Miss Lawson and refused to do anything she told him.

"And he is very intelligent?" went on Poirot.

"Oh, yes, very."

"How upset he'd be if he knew he had nearly killed his mistress."

I don't trust foreigners. They're so *artful*! And I'm quite sure dear Miss Arundell didn't want her money to get into *his* hands!"

"It is hard on Miss Theresa Arundell and Mr. Charles Arundell also to be deprived of their inheritance," Poirot suggested.

A spot of colour came into Miss Lawson's face.

"I think Theresa has quite as much money as is good for her!" she said sharply. "She spends hundreds of pounds on her clothes alone. And her underclothing—it's wicked! When one thinks of so many nice, well-bred girls who have to earn their own living—"

Poirot gently completed the sentence.

"You think it would do no harm for her to earn hers for a bit?"

Miss Lawson looked at him solemnly.

"It might do her a lot of *good*," she said. "It might bring her to her senses. Adversity teaches us many things."

Poirot nodded slowly. He was watching her intently.

"And Charles?"

"Charles doesn't deserve a penny," said Miss Lawson sharply. "If Miss Arundell cut him out of her will, it was for a very good cause—after his wicked threats."

"Threats?" Poirot's eyebrows rose.

"Yes, threats."

"What threats? When did he threaten her?"

"Let me see, it was—yes, of course, it was at Easter. Actually on *Easter Sunday*—which made it even worse!"

"What did he say?"

"He asked her for money and she'd refused to give it him! And then he told her that it wasn't wise of her. He said if she kept up that attitude he would—now what was the phrase—a very vulgar American one—oh, yes, he said he would bump her off!"

"He threatened to bump her off?"

"Yes."

"And what did Miss Arundell say?"

"She said: 'I think you'll find, Charles, that I can look after myself.'"

messages—all due, I am *convinced*, to Miss Arundell's attitude."

"I should think very likely due to Miss Arundell," agreed Poirot.

"But on that last evening—" continued Miss Lawson, "perhaps Isabel and Julia told you?—there were distinct phenomena. Actually the beginning of materialization. Ectoplasm—you know what ectoplasm is, perhaps?"

"Yes, yes, I am acquainted with its nature."

"It proceeds, you know, from the medium's mouth in the form of a *ribbon* and builds itself up into a *form*. Now I am *convinced*, Mr. Poirot, that *unknown to herself* Miss Arundell was a *medium*. On that evening I distinctly saw a *luminous ribbon* issuing from dear Miss Arundell's mouth! Then her head became enveloped in a luminous mist."

"Most interesting!"

"And then, unfortunately, Miss Arundell was suddenly taken ill and we had to break up the *séance*."

"You sent for the doctor—when?"

"First thing the following morning."

"Did he think the matter grave?"

"Well, he sent in a hospital nurse the following evening, but I think he hoped she would pull through."

"The—excuse me—the relatives were not sent for?" Miss Lawson flushed.

"They were notified as soon as possible—that is to say, when Dr. Grainger pronounced her to be in danger."

"What was the cause of the attack? Something she had eaten?"

"No, I don't think there was anything in particular. Dr. Grainger said she hadn't been quite as careful in diet as she should have been. I think he thought the attack was probably brought on by a chill. The weather had been very treacherous."

"Theresa and Charles Arundell had been down that week-end, had they not?"

Miss Lawson pursed her lips together.

"They had."

Miss Lawson did not answer. She merely shook her head and sighed.

Poirot asked :

"Do you think it possible that that fall influenced Miss Arundell to remake her will?"

We were getting perilously near the bone here, I thought, but Miss Lawson seemed to find the question quite natural.

"You know," she said, "I shouldn't wonder if you weren't right. It gave her a *shock*—I'm sure of that. Old people never like to think there's any chance of their dying. But an accident like that makes one *think*. Or perhaps she might have had a *premonition* that her death wasn't far off."

Poirot said casually :

"She was in fairly good health, was she not?"

"Oh, yes. Very well, indeed."

"Her illness must have come on very suddenly?"

"Oh, it did. It was quite a shock. We had had some friends that evening—" Miss Lawson paused.

"Your friends, the Misses Tripp. I have met those ladies. They are quite charming."

Miss Lawson's face flushed with pleasure.

"Yes, aren't they? Such *cultured* women! Such wide-interests. And so very *spiritual*! They told you perhaps—about our sittings? I expect you are a sceptic—but indeed, I wish I could tell you the inexpressible joy of getting into touch with those who passed over!"

"I am sure of it. I am sure of it."

"Do you know, Mr. Poirot, my mother has spoken to me—more than once. It is such a joy to know that one's dear ones are still thinking of one and watching over one."

"Yes, yes, I can well understand that," said Poirot gently. "And was Miss Arundell also a believer?"

Miss Lawson's face clouded over a little.

"She was willing to be convinced," she said doubtfully. "But I do not think she always approached the matter in the right frame of mind. She was sceptical and unbelieving—and once or twice her attitude attracted a most *undesirable* type of spirit! There were some very ribald

Poirot looked at her keenly and asked her an unexpected question.

"Do you like Mr. Purvis?"

Miss Lawson was flustered.

"Like Mr. Purvis? Well, really, that's difficult to say, isn't it? I mean, I'm sure he's a very *clever* man—that is, a clever lawyer, I mean. But rather a brusque *manner*! I mean, it's not very pleasant always to have some one speaking to you as though—well, really, I can't explain what I mean—he was quite civil and yet at the same time almost *rude*, if you know what I mean."

"A difficult situation for you," said Poirot sympathetically.

"Yes, indeed, it was."

Miss Lawson sighed and shook her head.

Poirot rose to his feet.

"Thank you very much, mademoiselle, for all your kindness and help."

Miss Lawson rose too. She sounded slightly flustered.

"I'm sure there's nothing to thank *me* for—nothing at all! So glad if I've been able to do anything—if there's anything more I *can* do—"

Poirot came back from the door. He lowered his voice.

"I think, Miss Lawson, that there is something you ought to be told. Charles and Theresa Arundell are hoping to upset this will."

A sharp flush of colour came into Miss Lawson's cheek.

"They can't do that," she said sharply. "My lawyer says so."

"Ah," said Poirot. "You have consulted a lawyer, then?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason at all. A very wise proceeding. Good-day to you, mademoiselle."

When we emerged from Clarendon Mansions into the street Poirot drew a deep breath.

"Hastings, *mon ami*, that woman is either exactly what she seems or else she is a very good actress."

"The visit was not a success," Poirot suggested, watching her.

"It was not." She added quite spitefully : "Miss Arundell knew what they'd come for!"

"Which was?" asked Poirot, watching her.

"Money!" snapped Miss Lawson. "And they didn't get it."

"No?" said Poirot.

"And I believe that's what Dr. Tanios was after too," she went on.

"Dr. Tanios. He was not down that same week-end, was he?"

"Yes, he came down on the Sunday. He only stayed about an hour."

"Every one seems to have been after poor Miss Arundell's money," hazarded Poirot.

"I know, it is not very nice to think of, is it?"

"No, indeed," said Poirot. "It must have been a shock to Charles and Theresa Arundell that week-end when they learned that Miss Arundell had definitely disinherited them!"

Miss Lawson stared at him.

Poirot said :

"Is that not so? Did she not specifically inform them of the fact?"

"As to that, I couldn't say. I didn't hear anything about it! There wasn't any *fuss*, or anything, as far as I know. Both Charles and his sister seemed to go away *quite* cheerful."

"Ah! Possibly I have been misinformed. Miss Arundell actually kept her will in the house, did she not?"

Miss Lawson dropped her pince-nez and stooped to pick them up.

"I really couldn't say. No, I think it was with Mr. Purvis."

"Who was the executor?"

"Mr. Purvis was."

"After the death, did he come over and look through her papers?"

"Yes, he did."

Tanios sat down; we did the same. She looked inquiringly at Poirot.

He began :

"It is in reference to the death of your aunt, the late Miss Emily Arundell."

Was I beginning to fancy things, or did a look of alarm spring up suddenly in those pale, prominent eyes.

"Yes?"

"Miss Arundell," said Poirot, "altered her will a very short time before she died. By the new will everything was left to Miss Wilhelmina Lawson. What I want to know, Mrs. Tanios, is whether you will join with your cousins, Miss Theresa and Mr. Charles Arundell, in trying to contest that will?"

"Oh!" Mrs. Tanios drew a deep breath. "But I don't think that's possible, is it? I mean, my husband consulted a lawyer and he seemed to think that it was better not to attempt it."

"Lawyers, madame, are cautious people. Their advice is usually to avoid litigation at all costs—and no doubt they are usually right. But there are times when it pays to take a risk. I am not a lawyer myself and therefore I look at the matter rather differently. Miss Arundell—Miss Theresa Arundell, I mean—is prepared to fight. What about you?"

"I—Oh! I really don't know." She twisted her fingers nervously together. "I should have to consult my husband."

"Certainly, you must consult your husband before anything definite is undertaken. But what are your own feelings in the matter?"

"Well, really, I don't know." Mrs. Tanios looked more worried than ever. "It depends so much on my husband."

"But you *yourself*, what do you think madame?"

Mrs. Tanios frowned, then she said slowly:

"I don't think I like the idea very much. It seems— it seems rather indecent, doesn't it?"

"Does it, madame?"

"Yes—after all, if Aunt Emily chose to leave her money away from her family, I suppose we must put up with it."

"She doesn't believe Miss Arundell's death was anything but natural. You can see that," I said.

Poirot did not answer. There are moments when he is conveniently deaf. He hailed a taxi.

"Durham Hotel, Bloomsbury," he told the driver.

CHAPTER XVI

Mrs. Tanios

"Gentleman to see you, madam."

The woman who was sitting writing at one of the tables in the writing-room of the Durham Hotel turned her head and then rose, coming towards us uncertainly.

Mrs. Tanios might have been any age over thirty. She was a tall, thin woman with dark hair, rather prominent light "boiled gooseberry" eyes and a worried face. A fashionable hat was perched on her head at an unfashionable angle and she wore a rather depressed-looking cotton frock.

"I don't think—" she began vaguely.

Poirot bowed.

"I have just come from your cousin, Miss Theresa Arundell."

"Oh! from Theresa? Yes?"

"Perhaps I could have a few minutes' private conversation?"

Mrs. Tanios looked about her rather vacantly. Poirot suggested a leather sofa at the far end of the room.

As we made our way there a high voice squeaked out.

"Mother, where are you going?"

"I shall be just over here. Go on with your letter, darling."

The child, a thin, peaky-looking girl of about seven, settled down again to what was evidently a laborious task. Her tongue showed through her parted lips in the effort of composition.

The far end of the room was quite deserted. Mrs.

"Madame, I have told you I am not a lawyer. But you have not asked me what my profession is."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I am a detective. And, a short time before she died, Miss Emily Arundell wrote me a letter."

Mrs. Tanios leaned forward; her hands pressed themselves together.

"A letter?" she asked abruptly. "About my husband?"

Poirot watched her for a minute or two, then he said slowly :

"I am afraid I am not at liberty to answer that question."

"Then it was about my husband," Her voice rose slightly. "What did she say? I can assure you, Mr.—er—I don't know your name."

"Poirot is my name, Hercule Poirot."

"I can assure you, Mr. Poirot, that if anything was said in that letter against my husband, it was entirely untrue! I know, too, who will have inspired that letter! And that is another reason why I would rather have nothing to do with *any* action undertaken by Theresa and Charles! Theresa has never liked my husband. She has said things! I know she has said things! And Emily was prejudiced against my husband because he was not an Englishman, and she may therefore have believed things that Theresa said about him. But they are not true, Mr. Poirot, you can take my word for that!"

"Mother—I've finished my letter."

Mrs. Tanios turned quickly. With an affectionate smile she took the letter from her and put it in her bag.

"That's very nice, darling, very nice indeed. And that's a beautiful drawing of Uncle Selim."

"What shall I do now, mother?"

"Would you like to get a new dress? I will give you on it? Here's the money. You go to the shop in the hall and choose one and then go and see Uncle Selim."

The child moved away. I remember now what Emily Arundell had said. Mrs. Tanios was a very kind wife and mother. She was also, like an earwig.

"You do not feel aggrieved in the matter, then?"

"Oh, yes, I do." A quick flush showed in her cheeks.

"I think it was most unfair! *Most* unfair! And so unexpected. It was so unlike Aunt Emily. And so very unfair on the children."

"You think it is very unlike Miss Arundell?"

"I think it was extraordinary of her!"

"Then isn't it possible that she was not acting of her own free will? Don't you think that perhaps she was being unduly influenced?"

Mrs. Tanios frowned again. Then she said almost unwillingly :

"The difficult thing is that I can't see Aunt Emily being influenced by *anybody*! She was such a decided old lady."

Poirot nodded approvingly.

"Yes, what you say is true. And Miss Lawson is hardly what one would describe as a strong character."

"No, she's a nice creature, really—rather foolish, perhaps—but very, very kind. That's partly why I feel—"

"Yes, madame?" said Poirot as she paused.

Mrs. Tanios twisted her fingers' nervously again as she answered :

"Well, that it would be mean to try and upset the will. I feel certain that it wasn't in any way Miss Lawson's doing—I'm sure she'd be quite incapable of scheming and intriguing—"

"Again, I agree with you, madame."

"And that's why I feel that to go to law would be—well, would be undignified and spiteful, and besides it would be very expensive, wouldn't it?"

"It would be expensive, yes."

"And probably useless, too. But you must speak to my husband about it. He's got a much better head for business than I have."

Poirot waited a minute or two, then he said :

"What reason do you think lay behind the making of that will?"

A quick colour rose in Mrs. Tanios's cheeks as she murmured : "I haven't the least idea."

There was no constraint in her manner now. words came freely with a rush.

"And as regards your husband—was there any change in her manner to him?"

The constraint had returned. She met Poirot's eyes as she replied:

"No, of course not—why should there?"

"But since you suggest that your husband, Arundell, might have tried to put you in his mind—"

"She did! I'm sure she did!" She went forward eagerly. "You are quite right. There was a change! Aunt Emily was different to him. And she behaved very badly. She gave him a special digestive mixture to take every day, to the trouble of getting it made up. She made it up, but rather stiffly, and she gave him the bottle down the sink."

Her indignation was plain.

Poirot's eyes flickered.

"A very odd proceeding," he said carefully unexcited.

"I thought it most unusual," he said hotly.

"As you say, elderly people are very times," said Poirot. "The doctors are the only ones who can account for a man's behavior."

"Yes, I suppose so," he said mollified.

"When do you think it happened?"

"In a few days after my husband's death."

"That is your only child, madame?"

"No, I have a little boy also. He is out with his father at the moment."

"They did not accompany you to Littlegreen House on your visits?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes, but you see, my aunt was rather old and children were inclined to worry her. But she was very kind and always sent them out nice presents at Christmas."

"Let me see, when did you last see Miss Emily Arundell?"

"I think it was just about ten days before she died."

"You and your husband and your two cousins were all down there together, were you not?"

"Oh, no, that was the week-end before—at Easter."

"And you and your husband were down there the week-end after Easter as well?"

"Yes."

"And Miss Arundell was in good health and spirits then?"

"Yes, she seemed much as usual."

"She was not ill in bed?"

"She was laid up with a fall she had had, but she came downstairs again while we were there."

"Did she say anything to you about having made a new will?"

"No, nothing at all."

"And her manner to you was quite unchanged?"

A slightly longer pause this time before Mrs. Tanios said : "Yes."

I feel sure that at that moment Poirot and I had the same conviction. Mrs. Tanios was lying!

Poirot paused a minute and then said :

"Perhaps I should explain that when I asked if Miss Arundell's manner to you was unchanged, I was not using the 'you' plural. I referred to *you* personally."

Mrs. Tanios replied quickly :

"Oh! I see. Aunt Emily was very nice to me. She gave me a little pearl and diamond brooch and she sent ten shillings to each of the children."

"No, no, I meant the week-end after that—on the 26th. You were there on the Sunday, I think?"

"Oh, Jacob, were you?" Mrs. Tanios looked at him wide-eyed.

He turned quickly.

"Yes, you remember? I just ran down in the afternoon. I told you about it."

Both Poirot and I were looking at her. Nervously she pushed her hat a little further back on her head.

"Surely you remember, Bella," her husband continued. "What a terrible memory you've got."

"Of course!" she apologized, a thin smile on her face. "It's quite true; I have a shocking memory. And it's nearly two months ago now."

"Miss Theresa Arundell and Mr. Charles Arundell were there then, I believe?" said Poirot.

"They may have been," said Tanios easily. "I didn't see them."

"You were not there very long then?"

"Oh, no—just half an hour or so."

Poirot's inquiring gaze seemed to make him a little uneasy.

"Might as well confess," he said with a twinkle. "I hoped to get a loan—but I didn't get it. I'm afraid my wife's aunt didn't take to me as much as she might. Pity, because I liked her. She was a sporting old lady."

"May I ask you a frank question, Dr. Tanios?"

Was there or was there not a momentary apprehension in Tanios's eye? "Certainly, M. Poirot."

"What is your opinion of Charles and Theresa Arundell?"

The doctor looked slightly relieved.

"Charles and Theresa?" He looked at his wife with an affectionate smile. "Bella, my dear, I don't suppose you mind my being frank about your family?"

She shook her head, smiling faintly.

"Then it's my opinion they're rotten to the core, both of them! Funnily enough I like Charles the best. He's a rogue, but he's a likable rogue. He's no moral sense, but he can't help that. People are born that way."

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Tanios

I must say that my first sight of Dr. Tanios was rather a shock. I had been imbuing him in my mind with all sorts of sinister attributes. I had been picturing to myself a dark bearded foreigner with a swarthy aspect and a sinister cast of countenance.

Instead, I saw a rotund, jolly, brown-haired, brown-eyed man. And though it is true he had a beard, it was a modest brown affair that made him look more like an artist.

He spoke English perfectly. His voice had a pleasant timbre and matched the cheerful good-humour of his face.

"Here we are," he said, smiling to his wife. "Edward has been passionately thrilled by his first ride in the tube. He has always been in buses until to-day."

Edward was not unlike his father in appearance, but both he and his little sister had a definitely foreign-looking appearance and I understood what Miss Peabody had meant when she described them as rather yellow-looking children.

The presence of her husband seemed to make Mrs. Tanios nervous. Stammering a little, she introduced Poirot to him. Me, she ignored.

Dr. Tanios took up the name sharply.

"Poirot? Monsieur Hercule Poirot? But I know that name well! And what brings you to us, M. Poirot?"

"It is the affair of a lady lately deceased. Miss Emily Arundell," replied Poirot.

"My wife's aunt? Yes—what of her?"

Poirot said slowly :

"Certain matters have arisen in connection with her death—"

Mrs. Tanios broke in suddenly :

"No, no, I meant the week-end after that—on the 26th. You were there on the Sunday, I think?"

"Oh, Jacob, were you?" Mrs. Tanios looked at him wide-eyed.

He turned quickly.

"Yes, you remember? I just ran down in the afternoon. I told you about it."

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"Of course!" she apologized, a thin smile on her face. "It's quite true; I have a shocking memory. And it's nearly two months ago now."

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"They may have been," said Tanios easily. "I didn't see them."

"You were not there very long then?"

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She shook her head, smiling faintly.

"Then it's my opinion they're rotten to the core, both of them! Funnily enough I like Charles the best. He's a rogue, but he's a likable rogue. He's no moral sense, but he can't help that. People are born that way."

"I'll give you an instance. The old lady had a fall down the stairs when we were staying there. I insisted on coming back the following week-end to see how she was. Miss Lawson did her utmost to prevent us. She didn't succeed, but she was annoyed about it, I could see. The reason was clear. *She wanted the old lady to herself.*"

Again Poirot turned to the wife.

"You agree, madame?"

Her husband did not give her time to answer.

"Bella's too kind-hearted," he said. "You won't get her to impute bad motives to anybody. But I'm quite sure I was right. I'll tell you another thing, M. Poirot. The secret of her ascendancy over old Miss Arundell was spiritualism! That's how it was done, depend upon it!"

"You think so?"

"Sure of it, my dear fellow. I've seen a lot of that sort of thing. It gets hold of people. You'd be amazed! Especially any one of Miss Arundell's age. I'd be prepared to bet that that's how the suggestion came. Some spirit—possibly her dead father—ordered her to alter her will and leave her money to the Lawson woman. She was in bad health—credulous—"

There was a very faint movement from Mrs. Tanios. Poirot turned to her.

"You think it possible—yes?"

"Speak up, Bella," said Dr. Tanios. "Tell us your views."

He looked at her encouragingly. Her quick look back at him was an odd one. She hesitated, then said:

"I know so little about these things. I dare say you're right, Jacob."

"Depend upon it I'm all right, eh, M. Poirot?"

Poirot nodded his head.

"It may be—yes." Then he said, "You were down at Market Basing, I think, the week-end before Miss Arundell's death?"

"We were down at Easter and again the week-end after—that is right."

"Your friend—M. Poirot—I suppose he has gone?"

"No, he is in the telephone box."

"Oh."

"You wanted to speak to him?"

She nodded. Her air of nervousness increased.

Poirot came out of the box at that moment and saw us standing together. He came quickly across to us.

"M. Poirot," she began quickly in a low, hurried voice. "There is something that I would like to say—that I *must* tell you—"

"Yes, madame."

"It is important—very important. You see—"

She stopped. Dr. Tanios and the two children had just emerged from the writing-room. He came across and joined us.

"Having a few last words with M. Poirot, Bella?"

His tone was good-humoured, the smile on his face pleasantness itself.

"Yes—" She hesitated, then said, "Well, that is really all, M. Poirot. I just wanted you to tell Theresa that we will back her up in anything she decides to do. I quite see that the family *must* stand together."

She nodded brightly to us, then taking her husband's arm she moved off in the direction of the dining-room.

I caught Poirot by the shoulder."

"That wasn't what she started to say, Poirot!"

He shook his head slowly, watching the retreating couple.

"She changed her mind," I went on.

"Yes, *mon ami*, she changed her mind."

"Why?"

"I wish I knew," he murmured.

"She will tell us some other time," I said hopefully.

"I wonder. I rather fear—she may not...."

"And Theresa?"

He hesitated.

"I don't know. She's an amazingly attractive young woman. But she's quite ruthless, I should say. She'd murder any one in cold blood if it suited her book. At least that's my fancy. You may have heard, perhaps, that her mother was tried for murder."

"And acquitted," said Poirot.

"As you say 'and acquitted,' " said Tanios quickly. "But all the same, it makes one—wonder sometimes."

"You met the young man to whom she is engaged?"

"Donaldson? Yes, he came to supper one night."

"What do you think of him?"

"A very clever fellow. I fancy he'll go far—if he gets the chance. It takes money to specialize."

"You mean that he is clever in his profession?"

"That is what I mean, yes. A first-class brain." He smiled.

"Not quite a shining light in society yet. A little precise and prim in manner. He and Theresa make a comic pair. The attraction of opposites. She's a social butterfly and he's a recluse."

The two children were bombarding their mother.

"Mother, can't we go in to lunch? I'm so hungry. We'll be late."

Poirot looked at his watch and gave an exclamation.

"A thousand pardons! I delay your lunch hour."

Glancing at her husband, Mrs. Tanios said uncertainly:

"Perhaps we can offer you—"

Poirot said quickly:

"You are most amiable, madame, but I have a luncheon engagement for which I am already late."

He shook hands with both the Tanioses and with the children. I did the same.

We delayed for a minute or two in the hall. Poirot wanted to put through a telephone call. I waited for him by the hall porter's desk. I was standing there when I saw Mrs. Tanios come out into the hall and look searchingly around. She had a hunted, harried look. She saw me and came swiftly across to me.

tings—it is a pot that boils and seethes and every now and then a significant fact comes to the surface and can be seen. There is *something* in the depths there—yes, there is *something*! I swear it, by my faith as Hercule Poirot, I swear it!"

I was impressed in spite of myself by his earnestness.

After a minute or two I said:

"Perhaps you are right, but it seems so vague—so nebulous."

"But you agree with me that there is *something*?"

"Yes," I said hesitatingly. "I believe I do."

Poirot leaned across the table. His eyes bored into mine.

"Yes—you have changed. You are no longer amused, superior—indulging me in my academic pleasures. But what is it that has convinced you? It is not my excellent reasoning—*non, ce n'est pas ça!* But *something*—something quite independent—has produced an effect on you. Tell me, my friend, what it is that has suddenly induced you to take this matter seriously?"

"I think," I said slowly, "it was Mrs. Tanios. She looked—she looked—*afraid....*"

"Afraid of me?"

"No—no, not of you. It was something else. She spoke so quietly and sensibly to begin with—a natural resentment at the terms of the will, perhaps, but otherwise she seemed so resigned and willing to leave things as they are. It seemed the natural attitude of a well-bred but rather apathetic woman. And then that sudden change—the eagerness with which she came over to Dr. Tanios's point of view. The way she came out into the hall after us—the—almost *furtive* way—"

Poirot nodded encouragingly.

"And another little thing which you may not have noticed—"

"I notice everything!"

"I mean the point about her husband's visit to Little-green House on that last Sunday. I could swear she knew nothing of it—that it was the most complete surprise to her—and yet she took her cue so quickly—agreed that

CHAPTER XVIII

"A Nigger in the Woodpile"

We had lunch at a small restaurant not far away. I was eager to learn what he made of the various members of the Arundell family.

"Well, Poirot?" I asked impatiently.

With a look of reproof Poirot turned his whole attention to the menu. When he had ordered he leaned back in his chair, broke his roll of bread in half and said with a slightly mocking intonation :

"Well, Hastings?"

"What do you think of them now you've seen them all?"

Poirot replied slowly :

"*Ma foi*, I think they are an interesting lot! Really this case is an enchanting study! It is, how do you say, the box of surprises? Look how each time I say, 'I got a letter from Miss Arundell before she died,' something crops up. From Miss Lawson I learn about the missing money. Mrs. Tanios says at once, 'About my husband?' Why about her husband? Why should Miss Arundell write to me, Hercule Poirot, about Dr. Tanios?"

"That woman has something on her mind," I said.

"Yes, she knows something. But *what*? Miss Peabody tells us that Charles Arundell would murder his grandmother for twopence. Miss Lawson says that Mrs. Tanios would murder any one if her husband told her to do so. Dr. Tanios says that Charles and Theresa are rotten to the core, and he hints that their mother was a murderess and says apparently carelessly that Theresa is capable of murdering any one in cold blood.

"They have a pretty opinion of each other, all these people! Dr. Tanios thinks, or says he thinks, that there was undue influence. His wife, before he came in, evidently did *not* think so. She does not want to contest the will at first. Later she veers round. See you, Has-

"*Très bien*. Now one cannot have attempted murder without a murderer. One of the people present on that evening was a murderer—in intention if not in fact."

"Granted."

"Then that is our starting point—a murderer. We make a few inquiries—we, as you would say, stir the mud—and what do we get—several very interesting accusations uttered apparently casually in the course of conversations."

"You think they were not casual?"

"Impossible to tell at the moment! Miss Lawson's innocent seeming way of bringing out the fact that Charles threatened his aunt may have been quite innocent or it may not. Dr. Tanios's remarks about Theresa Arundell may have absolutely no malice behind them, but be merely a physician's genuine opinion. Miss Peabody, on the other hand, is probably quite genuine in her opinion of Charles Arundell's proclivities—but it is, after all, merely an opinion. So it goes on. There is a saying, is there not, a nigger in the woodpile. *Eh bien*, that is just what I find here. There is—not a nigger—but a murderer in our woodpile."

"What I'd like to know is what you yourself really think, Poirot."

"Hastings—Hastings—I do not permit myself to 'think'—not, that is, in the sense that you are using the word. At the moment I only make certain reflections."

"Such as?"

"I consider the questions of motive. What are the likely *motives* for Miss Arundell's death? Clearly the most obvious one is *gain*. Who would have gained by Miss Arundell's death—if she had died on Easter Tuesday?"

"Every one—with the exception of Miss Lawson."

"Precisely."

"Well, at any rate, one person is automatically cleared."

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully. "It would seem so. But the interesting thing is that the person who would have gained nothing if death had occurred on Easter Tuesday gains everything when death occurs two weeks later."

he had told her about it and that she had forgotten. I—I didn't like it, Poirot."

"You are quite right, Hastings—it was significant—that."

"It left an ugly impression of—of fear on me."

Poirot nodded his head slowly.

"You felt the same?" I asked.

"Yes—that impression was very definitely in the air."

He paused and then went on: "And yet you liked Tanios, did you not? You found him an agreeable man, open-hearted, good-natured, genial. Attractive in spite of your insular prejudice against the Argentines, the Portuguese and the Greeks—a thoroughly congenial personality?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I did."

In the silence that ensued, I watched Poirot. Presently I said: "What are you thinking of, Poirot?"

"I am reflecting on various people, handsome young Norman Gale, bluff, hearty Evelyn Howard, the pleasant Dr. Sheppard, the quiet, reliable Knighton."

For a moment I did not understand these references to people who had figured in past cases.

"What of them?" I asked.

"They were all delightful personalities...."

"My goodness, Poirot, do you really think Tanios—"

"No, no. Do not jump to conclusions, Hastings. I am only pointing out that one's own personal reactions to people are singularly unsafe guides. One must go not by one's feelings but by facts."

"H'm," I said. "Facts are not our strong suit. No, no, Poirot, don't go over it all again!"

"I will be brief, my friend, do not fear. To begin with, we have quite certainly a case of attempted murder. You admit that, do you not?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I do."

I had, up to now, been a little sceptical over Poirot's (as I thought) somewhat fanciful reconstruction of the events on the night of Easter Tuesday. I was forced to admit, however, that his deductions were perfectly logical.

"Of course. Of course," I said hurriedly.

"And then," continued Poirot, "various other things happen. Charles and Theresa come for the week-end, and Miss Arundell shows the new will to Charles—er—so he says."

"Don't you believe him?"

"I only believe statements that are *checked*. Miss Arundell does not show it to Theresa."

"Because she thought Charles would tell her."

"But he doesn't. *Why* doesn't he?"

"According to Charles himself he *did* tell her."

"Theresa said quite positively that he *didn't*—a very interesting and suggestive little clash. And when we depart she calls him a fool."

"I'm getting fogged, Poirot," I said plaintively.

"Let us return to the sequence of events. Dr. Tanios comes down on Sunday—possibly without the knowledge of his wife."

"I should say certainly without her knowledge."

"Let us say *probably*. To proceed! Charles and Theresa leave on the Monday. Miss Arundell is in good health and spirits. She eats a good dinner and sits in the dark with the Tripps and Miss Lawson. Towards the end of the *séance* she is taken ill. She retires to bed and dies four days later and Miss Lawson inherits all her money, and Captain Hastings says she died a natural death!"

"Whereas Hercule Poirot says she was given poison in her dinner on no evidence at all!"

"I have *some* evidence, Hastings. Think over our conversation with the Misses Tripp. And also one statement that stood out from Miss Lawson's somewhat rambling conversation."

"Do you mean the fact that she had curry for dinner? Curry would mask the taste of a drug. Is that what you meant?"

Poirot said slowly :

"Yes, the curry has a certain significance, perhaps."

"But," I said, "if what you advance (in defiance of all the medical evidence) is true, only Miss Lawson or one of the maids could have killed her."

"What are you getting at, Poirot?" I said, slightly puzzled.

"Cause and effect, my friend, cause and effect."
I looked at him doubtfully.

He went on :

"Proceed logically! What exactly happened—after the accident?"

I hate Poirot in this mood. Whatever one says is bound to be wrong! I proceeded with intense caution.

"Miss Arundell was laid up in bed."

"Exactly. With plenty of time to think. What next?"

"She wrote to you."

Poirot nodded.

"Yes, she wrote to me. And the letter was not posted. A thousand pities, that."

"Do you suspect that there was something fishy about that letter not being posted?"

Poirot frowned.

"There, Hastings, I have to confess that I do not know. I think—in view of everything I am almost sure—that the letter was genuinely mislaid. I believe—but I cannot be sure—that the fact that such a letter was written was unsuspected by anybody. Continue—what happened next?"

I reflected.

"The lawyer's visit," I suggested.

"Yes—she sent for her lawyer and in due course he arrived."

"And she made a new will," I continued.

"Precisely. She made a new and very unexpected will. Now, in view of that will we have to consider very carefully a statement made to us by Ellen. Ellen said, if you remember, that Miss Lawson was particularly anxious that the news that Bob had been out all night should not get to Miss Arundell's ears."

"But—oh, I see—no, I don't. Or do I begin to see what you are hinting at?...."

"I doubt it!" said Poirot. "But if you do, you realize, I hope, the *supreme importance* of that statement."

He fixed me with a fierce eye.

CHAPTER XIX

Visit to Mr. Purvis

Poirot called for his bill and paid it.

"What do we do next?" I asked.

"We are going to do what you suggested this morning. We are going to Harchester to interview Mr. Purvis. That is why I telephoned from the Durham Hotel."

"You telephoned to Purvis?"

"No, to Theresa Arundell. I asked her to write me a letter of introduction to him. To approach him with any chance of success we must be accredited by the family. She promised to send it round to my flat by hand. It should be awaiting us there now."

We found not only the letter but Charles Arundell, who had brought it round in person.

"Nice place you have here, M. Poirot," he remarked, glancing round the sitting-room of the flat.

At that moment my eye was caught by an imperfectly shut drawer in the desk. A small slip of paper was preventing it from shutting.

Now if there was one thing absolutely incredible it was that Poirot should shut a drawer in such a fashion! I looked thoughtfully at Charles. He had been alone in this room awaiting our arrival. I had no doubt that he had been passing the time by snooping among Poirot's papers. What a young crook the fellow was! I felt myself burning with indignation.

Charles himself was in a most cheerful mood.

"Here we are," he remarked, presenting a letter. "All present and correct—and I hope you'll have more luck with old Purvis than we did."

"He held out very little hope, I suppose?"

"Definitely discouraging.... In his opinion the Lawson bird had clearly got away with the doings."

"You and your sister have never considered an appeal to the lady's feelings?"

"I wonder."

"Or the Tripp women? Nonsense. I can't believe that! All these people are palpably innocent."

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Remember this, Hastings, stupidity—or even silliness, for that matter—can go hand in hand with intense cunning. And do not forget the original attempt at murder. That was not the handiwork of a particularly clever or complex brain. It was a very *simple* little murder, suggested by Bob and his habit of leaving the ball at the top of the stairs. The thought of putting a thread across the stairs was quite simple and easy—a child could have thought of it!"

I frowned.

"You mean—"

"I mean that what we are seeking to find here is just one thing—the wish to kill. Nothing more than that."

"But the poison must have been a very skilful one to leave no trace," I argued. "Something that the ordinary person would have difficulty in getting hold of. Oh, damn it all, Poirot, I simply can't believe it now. You can't *know*! It's all pure hypothesis."

"You are wrong, my friend. As the result of our various conversations this morning I have now something definite to go upon. Certain faint but unmistakable indications. The only thing is—I am afraid."

"Afraid? Of what?"

He said gravely :

"Of disturbing the dogs that sleep. That is one of your proverbs, is it not? To let the sleeping dogs lie! That is what our murderer does at present—sleeps happily in the sun.... Do we not know, you and I, Hastings, how often a murderer, his confidence disturbed, turns and kills a second—or even a *third* time!"

"You are afraid of that happening?"

He nodded.

"Yes. *If* there is a murderer in the woodpile—and I think there is, Hastings. Yes, I think there is...."

She said, rather sniffily, what did I mean. "The thing," I said. "Here are your friends and relations all hanging around with their mouths open, all as poor as church mice—whatever church mice may be—all hanging. And what do you do? Sit down on the dais and refuse to part. That's the way people get themselves murdered. Take it from me, if you're bumped off, you'll only have yourself to blame."

"She looked at me then, over the top of her spectacles in a way she had. Looked at me rather nastily. 'Oh,' she said drily enough, 'so that's your opinion, is it?' 'It is,' I said. 'You loosen up a bit, that's my advice to you.' 'Thank you, Charles,' she said, 'for your well-meant advice. But I think you'll find I'm well able to take care of myself.' 'Please yourself, Aunt Emily,' I said. I was grinning all over my face—and I fancy she wasn't as grim as she tried to look. 'Don't say I didn't warn you.' 'I'll remember it,' she said."

He paused.

"That's all there was to it."

"And so," said Poirot, "you contented yourself with a few pound notes you found in a drawer."

Charles stared at him, then burst out laughing.

"I take off my hat to you," he said. "You're some sleuth! How did you get hold of *that*?"

"It is true, then?"

"Oh, it's true enough! I was damned hard up. Had to get money somehow. Found a nice little wad of notes in a drawer and helped myself to a few. I was very modest—didn't think my little subtraction would be noticed. Even then, they'd probably think it was the servants."

Poirot said drily:

"It would be very serious for the servants if such an idea had been entertained."

Charles shrugged his shoulders.

"Every one for himself," he murmured.

"And *le diable* takes the hindmost," said Poirot.

"That is your creed, is it?"

Charles was looking at him curiously.

"I didn't know the old lady had ever spotted it. How

Charles grinned.

"I considered it—yes. But there seemed to be nothing doing. My eloquence was in vain. The pathetic picture of the disinherited black sheep—and a sheep not so black as he was painted (or so I endeavoured to suggest)—failed to move the woman! You know, she definitely seems to dislike me! I don't know why." He laughed. "Most old women fall for me quite easily. They think I've never been properly understood and that I've never had a fair chance!"

"A useful point of view."

"Oh, it's been extremely useful before now. But, as I say, with the Lawson bird, nothing doing. I think she's rather anti-man. Probably used to chain herself to railings and wave a suffragette flag in good old pre-war days."

"Ah, well," said Poirot, shaking his head. "If simpler methods fail—"

"We must take to crime," said Charles cheerfully.

"Aha," said Poirot. "Now, speaking of crime, young man, is it true that you threatened your aunt—that you said that you would 'bump her off,' or words to that effect?"

Charles sat down in a chair, stretched his legs out in front of him and stared hard at Poirot.

"Now who told you that?" he said.

"No matter. Is it true?"

"Well, there are elements of truth about it."

"Come, come, let me hear the true story—the *true* story, mind."

"Oh, you can have it, sir. There was nothing melodramatic about it. I'd been attempting a touch—if you gather what I mean."

"I comprehend."

"Well, that didn't go according to plan. Aunt Emily intimated that any efforts to separate her and her money would be quite unavailing! Well, I didn't lose my temper, but I put it to her plainly. 'Now look here, Aunt Emily,' I said, 'you know, you're going about things in such a way that you'll end by getting bumped off!'

stopped suddenly and then went on—"strychnine in Aunt Emily's soup."

With a careless wave of his hand he departed.

"Were you trying to frighten him, Poirot?" I asked. "If so, I don't think you succeeded. He showed no guilty reactions whatsoever."

"No?"

"No. He seemed quite unruffled."

"Curious that pause he made," said Poirot.

"A pause?"

"Yes. A pause before the word 'strychnine.' Almost as though he had been about to say something else and thought better of it."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"He was probably thinking of a good, venomous-sounding poison."

"It is possible. It is possible. But let us set off. We will, I think, stay the night at The George in Market Basing."

Ten minutes later saw us speeding through London, bound once more for the country.

We arrived in Harchester about four o'clock and made our way straight to the offices of Purvis, Purvis, Charlesworth and Purvis.

Mr. Purvis was a big, solidly built man with white hair and a rosy complexion. He had a little the look of a country squire. His manner was courteous but reserved.

He read the letter we had brought and then looked at us across the top of his desk. It was a shrewd look and a somewhat searching one.

"I know you by name, of course, M. Poirot," he said politely. "Miss Arundell and her brother have, I gather, engaged your services in this matter, but exactly in what capacity you propose to be of use to them I am at a loss to imagine."

"Shall we say, Mr. Purvis, a fuller investigation of all the circumstances?"

The lawyer said drily: "Miss Arundell and her

did you come to know about it—and about the bumping-off conversation?"

"Miss Lawson told me."

"The sly old pussy cat!" He looked, I thought, just a shade disturbed. "She doesn't like me and she doesn't like Theresa," he said presently. "You don't think—she's got anything more up her sleeve?"

"What could she have?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just that she strikes me as a malicious old devil." He paused. "She hates Theresa..." he added.

"Did you know, Mr. Arundell, that Dr. Tanios came down to see your aunt on the Sunday before she died?"

"What—on the Sunday that we were there?"

"Yes. You did not see him?"

"No. We were out for a walk in the afternoon. I suppose he must have come then. Funny that Aunt Emily didn't mention his visit. Who told you?"

"Miss Lawson."

"Lawson again? She seems to be a mine of information."

He paused and then said: "You know, Tanios is a nice fellow. I like him. Such a jolly, smiling chap."

"He has an attractive personality, yes," said Poirot. Charles rose to his feet.

"If I'd been him I'd have murdered the dreary Bella years ago! Doesn't she strike you as the type of woman who is marked out by fate to be a victim? You know, I should never be surprised if bits of her turned up in a trunk at Margate or somewhere!"

"It is not a pretty action that you attribute there to her husband the good doctor," said Poirot severely.

"No," said Charles meditatively. "And I don't think really that Tanios would hurt a fly. He's much too kind-hearted."

"And what about you? Would you do murder if it were made worth your while?"

Charles laughed—a ringing, genuine laugh.

"Thinking about a spot of blackmail, M. Poirot? Nothing doing. I can assure you that I didn't put"—he

"How did she look to you?"

"She seemed to me in good health in spite of the fact that she was walking with a stick. That, I understand, was on account of a fall she had recently. Her general health, as I say, seemed good. She struck me as slightly nervous and over-excited in manner."

"Was Miss Lawson with her?"

"She was with her when I arrived. But she left us immediately."

"And then?"

"Miss Arundell asked me if I had done what she had asked me to do, and if I had brought the new will with me for her to sign."

"I said I had done so. I—er—" He hesitated for a minute or two, then went on stiffly: "I may as well say that, as far as it was proper for me to do so, I remonstrated with Miss Arundell. I pointed out to her that this new will might be regarded as grossly unfair to her family who were, after all, her own flesh and blood."

"And her answer?"

"She asked me if the money was or was not her own to do with as she liked. I replied that certainly that was the case. 'Very well then,' she said. I reminded her that she had known this Miss Lawson a very short time, and I asked her if she was quite sure that the injustice she was doing to her own family was legitimate. Her reply was, 'My dear friend, I know perfectly what I am doing.'"

"Her manner was excited, you say."

"I think I can definitely say that it was, but understand me, M. Poirot, she was in full possession of her faculties. She was in every sense of the word fully competent to manage her own affairs. Though my sympathies are entirely with Miss Arundell's family, I should be obliged to maintain that in any court of law."

"That is quite understood. Proceed. I pray of you."

"Miss Arundell read through her existing will. Then she stretched out her hand for the one I had had drawn up. I may say that I would have preferred to submit a draft first, but she had impressed upon me that the will

brother have already had my opinion as to the legal position. The circumstances were perfectly clear and admit of no misrepresentation."

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Poirot quickly. "But you will not, I am sure, object to just repeating them so that I can envisage the situation clearly."

The lawyer bowed his head.

"I am at your service."

Poirot began :

"Miss Arundell wrote to you giving you instructions on the seventeenth of April, I believe?"

Mr. Purvis consulted some papers on the table before him.

"Yes, that is correct."

"Can you tell me what she said?"

"She asked me to draw up a will. There were to be legacies to two servants and to three or four charities. The rest of her estate was to pass to Wilhelmina Lawson absolutely."

"You will pardon me, Mr. Purvis, but you were surprised?"

"I will admit that—yes, I was surprised."

"Miss Arundell had made a will previously?"

"Yes, she had made a will five years ago."

"That will, after certain small legacies, left her property to her nephew and nieces?"

"The bulk of her estate was to be divided equally between the children of her brother Thomas and the daughter of Arabella Biggs, her sister."

"What has happened to that will?"

"At Miss Arundell's request I brought it with me when I visited her at Littlegreen House on April 21st."

"I should be much obliged to you, Mr. Purvis, if you would give me a full description of everything that occurred on that occasion."

The lawyer paused for a minute or two. Then he said, very precisely :

"I arrived at Littlegreen House at three o'clock in the afternoon. One of my clerks accompanied me. Miss Arundell received me in the drawing-room."

"It was advisable, I thought, that Miss Lawson should not be aware of what had happened. I endeavoured to hint as much and Miss Arundell seemed quite of my opinion."

"Just why did you stress that point, Mr. Purvis?"

The old gentleman returned his glance with dignity.

"Such things, in my opinion, are best undiscussed. Also it might have led to future disappointment."

"Ah!" Poirot drew a long breath. "I take it that *you thought it probable that Miss Arundell might change her mind in the near future?*"

The lawyer bowed his head.

"That is so. I fancied that Miss Arundell had had some violent altercation with her family. I thought it probable that when she cooled down she would repent of her rash decision."

"In which case she would have done—what?"

"She would have given me instructions to prepare a new will."

"She might have taken the simpler course of merely destroying the will lately made, in which case the older will would have been good?"

"That is a somewhat debatable point. All earlier wills, you understand, had been definitely revoked by the testator."

"But Miss Arundell would not have had the legal knowledge to appreciate that point. She may have thought that by destroying the later will, the earlier one would stand."

"It is quite possible."

"Actually, if she died intestate, her money would pass to her family?"

"Yes. One half to Mrs. Tanios, one half divisible between Charles and Theresa Arundell. But the fact remains, however, that she did *not* change her mind! She died with her decision unchanged."

"But that," said Poirot, "is where I come in."

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly.

Poirot leaned forward.

"Supposing," he said, "that Miss Arundell, on her

must be brought her ready to sign. That presented no difficulties as its provisions were so simple. She read it through, nodded her head, and said she would sign it straightaway. I felt it my duty to enter one last protest. She heard me out quite patiently, but said that her mind was quite made up. I called in my clerk and he and the gardener acted as witnesses to her signature. The servants, of course, were ineligible owing to the fact that they were beneficiaries under the will."

"And afterwards, did she entrust the will to you for safe-keeping?"

"No, she placed it in a drawer of her desk, which drawer she locked."

"What was done with the original will? Did she destroy it?"

"No, she locked it away with the other."

"After her death, where was the will found?"

"In that same drawer. As executor I had her keys and went through her papers and business documents."

"Were both wills in the drawer?"

"Yes, exactly as she had placed them there."

"Did you question her at all as to the motive for this rather surprising action?"

"I did. But I got no satisfactory answer. She merely assured me that 'she knew what she was doing.'"

"Nevertheless you were surprised at the proceeding?"

"Very surprised. Miss Arundell, I should say, had always shown herself to have a strong sense of family feeling."

Poirot was silent a minute, then he asked :

"You did not, I suppose, have any conversation with Miss Lawson on the subject?"

"Certainly not. Such a proceeding would have been highly improper."

Mr. Purvis looked scandalized at the mere suggestion.

"Did Miss Arundell say anything to indicate that Miss Lawson knew that a will was being drawn in her favour?"

"On the contrary. I asked her if Miss Lawson was aware of what was being done, and Miss Arundell snapped out that she knew nothing about it."

CHAPTER XX

Second Visit to Littlegreen House

On our way from Harchester to Market Basing, a matter of some ten miles, we discussed the situation.

"Have you any grounds at all, Poirot, for that suggestion you threw out?"

"You mean that Miss Arundell may have believed that that particular will was destroyed? No, *mon ami*—frankly, no. But it was incumbent upon me—you must perceive that—to make *some* sort of suggestion! Mr. Purvis is a shrewd man. Unless I threw out some hint of the kind I did, he would ask himself what I could be doing in this affair."

"Do you know what you remind me of, Poirot?"

"No, *mon ami*."

"Of a juggler juggling with a lot of different-coloured balls! They are all in the air at once."

"The different-coloured balls are the different lies I tell—eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"And some day, you think, there will come the grand crash?"

"You can't keep it up for ever," I pointed out.

"That is true. There will come the grand moment when I catch the balls one by one, make my bow, and walk off the stage."

"To the sound of thunderous applause from the audience."

Poirot looked at me rather suspiciously.

"That well may be, yes."

"We didn't learn very much from Mr. Purvis," I remarked, edging away from the danger-point.

"No, except that it confirmed our general ideas."

"And it confirmed Miss Lawson's statement that she knew nothing about the will until after the old lady's death."

deathbed, *wished to destroy that will.* Supposing that she believed that she *had* destroyed it—but that, in reality, she only destroyed the *first* will.”

Mr. Purvis shook his head.

“No, *both* wills were intact.”

“Then supposing she destroyed a *dummy* will—*under the impression that she was destroying the genuine document.* She was very ill, remember; it would be easy to deceive her.”

“You would have to bring evidence to that effect,” said the lawyer sharply.

“Oh, undoubtedly—undoubtedly....”

“Is there—may I ask—is there any reason to believe something of the kind happened?”

Poirot drew back a little.

“I should not like to commit myself at this stage—”

“Naturally, naturally,” said Mr. Purvis, agreeing with a phrase that was familiar to him.

“But I may say, strictly in confidence, that there are some curious features about this business!”

“Really? You don’t say so?”

Mr. Purvis rubbed his hands together with a kind of pleasurable anticipation.

“What I wanted from you and what I have got,” continued Poirot, “is your opinion that Miss Arundell would, sooner or later, have changed her mind and relented towards her family.”

“That is only my personal opinion, of course,” the lawyer pointed out.

“My dear sir, I quite understand. You do not, I believe, act for Miss Lawson?”

“I advised Miss Lawson to consult an independent solicitor,” said Mr. Purvis.

His tone was wooden.

Poirot shook hands with him, thanking him for his kindness and the information he had given us.

Bob, dragged by the collar, was immured in the morning-room much against his will.

"Always spoiling a fellow's sport," he grumbled. "First chance I've had of giving any one a really good fright for ever so long. Just aching to get my teeth into a trouser leg. You be careful of yourself without me to protect you."

The door of the morning-room was shut on him, and Ellen drew back bolts and bars and opened the front door.

"Oh, it's you, sir," she exclaimed.

She drew the door right back. A look of highly pleasurable excitement spread over her face.

"Come in, sir, if you please, sir."

We entered the hall. From beneath the door on the left, loud snuffling sounds proceeded, interspersed with growls. Bob was endeavouring to "place" us correctly.

"You can let him out," I suggested.

"I will, sir. He's quite all right, really, but he makes such a noise and rushes at people so it frightens them. He's a splendid watchdog though."

She opened the morning-room door, and Bob shot through like a suddenly projected cannon-ball.

"Who is it? Where are they? Oh, there you are. Dear me, don't I seem to remember—" Sniff—sniff—sniff—prolonged snort. "Of course! We *have* met!"

"Hullo, old man," I said. "How goes it?"

Bob wagged his tail perfunctorily.

"Nicely, thank you. Let me just see—" He resumed his researches. "Been talking to a spaniel lately, I smell. Foolish dogs, I think. What's this? A cat? That is interesting. Wish we had her there. We'd have a rare sport. H'm—not a bad bull-terrier."

Having correctly diagnosed a visit I had lately paid to some doggy friends, he transferred his attentions to Poirot, inhaled a noseful of benzine and walked away reproachfully.

"Bob," I called.

He threw me a look over his shoulder.

"Me, I do not see that it confirmed anything of the sort."

"Purvis advised Miss Arundell not to tell her, and Miss Arundell replied that she had no intention of doing so."

"Yes, that is all very nice and clear. But there are keyholes, my friend, and keys that unlock locked drawers."

"Do you really think that Miss Lawson would eavesdrop and poke and pry around?" I asked, rather shocked.

Poirot smiled.

"Miss Lawson—she is not an old school tie, *mon cher*. We know that she overheard *one* conversation which she was not supposed to have heard—I refer to the one in which Charles and his aunt discussed the question of bumping off miserly relatives."

I admitted the truth of that.

"So you see, Hastings, she may easily have overheard some of the conversation between Mr. Purvis and Miss Arundell. He has a good, resonant voice.

"As for poking and prying," went on Poirot, "more people do it than you would suppose. Timid and easily frightened people such as Miss Lawson often acquire a number of mildly dishonourable habits which are a great solace and recreation to them."

"Really, Poirot!" I protested.

He nodded his head a good many times.

"But yes, it is so, it is so."

We arrived at The George and took a couple of rooms. Then we strolled off in the direction of Littlegreen House.

When we rang the bell, Bob immediately answered the challenge. Dashing across the hall, barking furiously, he flung himself against the front door.

"I'll have your liver and your lights!" he snarled. "I'll tear you limb from limb! I'll teach you to try and get into *this* house! Just wait until I get my teeth into you."

A soothing murmur added itself to the clamour.

"Now then, boy. Now then, there's a good doggie. Come in here."

"Yes, and I'm afraid she was rather hard about the poor lady. I'm sorry, too, for no doubt it was really meant on the doctor's part."

"No doubt. No doubt. I suppose my medicine that were left in the house were thrown away when Miss Arundell died?"

Ellen looked a little surprised at the question.

"Oh, yes, sir. The nurse threw away some and Miss Lawson got rid of all the old lot in the medicine-chest in the bathroom."

"Is that where the—er—Dr. Longbottom's Little Capsules were kept?"

"No, they were kept in the commode-cabinet in the dining-room so as to be handy for using the pills as directed."

"What nurse attended Miss Arundell? Can you give me her name and address?"

Ellen could supply that at once and did.

Poirot continued to ask questions about Miss Arundell's last illness.

Ellen gave details with relish, describing the sickness, the pain, the onset of jaundice, and the final delirium. I don't know whether Poirot got any satisfaction out of the catalogue. He listened patiently enough and occasionally interpolated some pertinent little question, usually about Miss Lawson and the amount of time she spent in the sick-room. He was also exceedingly interested in the diet administered to the ill woman, comparing it with that administered to some dead relative (non-existent) of his own.

Seeing that they were enjoying themselves so much, I stole out in the hall again. Bob had gone to sleep on the landing, his ball lying under his chin.

I whistled to him and he sprang up, alert at once. This time, however, doubtless out of offended dignity, he made a protracted business of dispatching the ball down to me, several times catching it back at the last minute.

"Disappointed, aren't you? Well, perhaps I will let you have it this time."

When I next went back to the morning-room, Poirot

"It's all right. I know what I'm doing. I'll be back in a jiffy."

"The house is all shut up. I hope you'll excuse—"
Ellen hurried into the morning-room and began to unfasten the shutters.

"Excellent, this is excellent," said Poirot, following her in and sitting down. As I was about to join him, Bob reappeared from some mysterious region, ball in mouth. He dashed up the stairs and sprawled himself on the top step, his ball between his paws. His tail wagged slowly.

"Come on," he said. "Come on. Let's have a game."

My interest in detection momentarily eclipsed, we played for some minutes, then with a feeling of guilt I hurried into the morning-room.

Poirot and Ellen seemed to be well away on the subject of illness and medicines.

"Some little white pills, sir, that's all she used to take. Two or three after every meal. That was Dr. Grainger's orders. Oh, yes, she was very good about it. Tiny little things they were. And then there was some stuff Miss Lawson swore by. Capsules, they were, Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules. You can see advertisements of them on all the hoardings."

"She took those too?"

"Yes. Miss Lawson got her them to begin with, and she thought they did her good."

"Did Dr. Grainger know?"

"Oh, sir, he didn't mind. 'You take 'em if you think they do you good,' he'd say to her. And she said, 'Well, you may laugh, but they *do* do me good. A lot better than any of *your* physic.' And Dr. Grainger, he laughed, and said faith was worth all the drugs ever invented."

"She didn't take anything else?"

"No. Miss Bella's husband, the foreign doctor, he went out and got her a bottle of something, but although she thanked him very politely she poured it away and that I know for a fact! And I think she was right. You don't know where you are with these foreign things."

"Mrs. Tanios saw her pouring it away, didn't she?"

top uttered an exclamation and stooped to his trouser-leg.

"Ah—I have just caught a thread—ah, yes, there is a nail here in the skirting-board."

"Yes, there is, sir. I think it must have worked loose or something. I've caught my dress on it once or twice."

"Has it been like that long?"

"Well, some time, I'm afraid, sir. I noticed it first when the mistress was laid up—after her accident, that was, sir—I tried to pull it out but I couldn't."

"It has had a thread round it some time, I think."

"That's right, sir, there was a little loop of thread, I remember. I can't think what for, I'm sure."

But there was no suspicion in Ellen's voice. To her it was just one of the things that occur in houses and which one does not bother to explain!

Poirot had stepped into the room at the top of the stairs. It was of moderate size. There were two windows directly facing us. There was a dressing-table across one corner and between the windows was a wardrobe with a long mirror. The bed was to the right behind the door facing the windows. On the left-hand wall of the room was a big mahogany chest of drawers and a marble-topped washstand.

Poirot looked round the room thoughtfully and then came out again on the landing. He went along the passage, passing two other bedrooms, and then came to the large bed-chamber which had belonged to Emily Arundell.

"The nurse had the little room next door," Ellen explained.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As we descended the stairs, he asked if he might walk round the garden.

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly. It looks lovely just now."

"The gardener is still employed?"

"Angus? Oh, yes, Angus is still here. Miss Lawson wants everything kept nice because she thinks it will sell better that way."

"I think she is wise. To let a place run to seed is not the good policy."

was talking about Dr. Tanios's surprise visit on the Sunday before the old lady's death.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Charles and Miss Theresa were out for a walk. Dr. Tanios wasn't expected, I know. The mistress was lying down and she was very surprised when I told her who it was. 'Dr. Tanios?' she said. 'Is Mrs. Tanios with him?' I told her no, the gentleman had come alone. So she said to tell him she'd be down in a minute."

"Did he stay long?"

"Not above an hour, sir. He didn't look too pleased when he went away."

"Have you any idea of the—er—purpose of his visit?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir."

"You did not happen to hear anything?"

Ellen's face flushed suddenly.

"No, I did *not*, sir! I've never been one to listen at doors, no matter what *some* people will do—and people who ought to know better!"

"Oh, but you misunderstand me." Poirot was eager, apologetic. "It just occurred to me that perhaps you might have brought in tea while the gentleman was there and if so, you could hardly have helped hearing what he and your mistress were talking about."

Ellen was mollified.

"I'm sorry, sir, I misunderstood you. No, Dr. Tanios didn't stay for tea."

Poirot looked up at her and twinkled a little.

"And if I want to know what he came down for—well, it is possible that Miss Lawson might be in a position to know? Is that it?"

"Well, if she doesn't know, sir, nobody does," said Ellen with a sniff.

"Let me see." Poirot frowned as though trying to remember. "Miss Lawson's bedroom—was it next to Miss Arundell's?"

"No, sir. Miss Lawson's room is right at the top of the staircase. I can show you, sir."

Poirot accepted the offer. As he went up the stairs he kept close to the wall side, and just as he reached the

with you! Ah, that made him laugh proper, that did! It was a good one, that!"

We laughed as in duty bound. Poirot prised up the lid of the tin.

"Nearly empty," he murmured.

The old man had a look.

"Ay, there's more gone than I thought. No idea I'd used that much. I'll be having to order some more."

"Yes," said Poirot, smiling. "I'm afraid there's hardly enough for you to spare me some for *my* wife!"

We all had another good laugh over this witticism.

"You're not married, I take it, mister?"

"No."

"Ah! It's always them as isn't that can afford to joke about it. Those that isn't married don't know what trouble is!"

"I gather that your wife—?" Poirot paused delicately.

"She's alive all right—very much so."

Angus seemed a little depressed about it.

Complimenting him on his garden, we bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XXI

The Chemist. The Nurse. The Doctor

The tin of weed-killer had started a new train of thought in my mind. It was the first definite suspicious circumstance that I had encountered. Charles's interest in it, the old gardener's obvious surprise at finding the tin almost empty—it all seemed to point in the right direction.

Poirot was, as usual when I am excited, very non-committal.

"Even if some of the weed-killer *has* been taken, there is as yet no evidence that Charles was the person to take it, Hastings."

The garden was very peaceful and beautiful. The wide borders were full of lupins and delphiniums and great scarlet poppies. The peonies were in bud. Wandering along, we came presently to a potting-shed where a big, rugged old man was busy. He saluted us respectfully and Poirot engaged him in conversation.

A mention that we had seen Mr. Charles that day thawed the old man and he became quite garrulous.

"Always a one, he was! I've known him come out here with half a gooseberry pie and the cook hunting high and low for it! And he'd go back with such an innocent face that durned if they wouldn't say it must have been the cat, though I've never known a cat eat a gooseberry pie! Oh, he's a one, Mr. Charles is!"

"He was down here in April, wasn't he?"

"Yes, down here two week-ends. Just before the missus died, it was."

"Did you see much of him?"

"A good bit, I did. There wasn't much for a young gentleman to do down here, and that's a fact. Used to stroll up to The George and have one. And then he'd potter round here, asking me questions about one thing and another."

"About flowers?"

"Yes—flowers—and weeds too." The old man chuckled.

"Weeds?"

Poirot's voice held a sudden, tentative note. He turned his head and looked searchingly along the shelves. His eye stopped at a tin.

"Perhaps he wanted to know how you got rid of them?"

"He did that!"

"I suppose this is the stuff you use."

Poirot turned the tin gently round and read the label.

"That's it," said Angus. "Very handy stuff it is."

"Dangerous stuff?"

"Not if you use it right. It's arsenic, of course. Had a bit of a joke about that, Mr. Charles and I did. Said as how when he had a wife and didn't like her, he'd come to me and get a little of that stuff to put her away with! Maybe, I sez, *she'll* be the one that wants to do away

ively wrapped package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Yes, sir, a very good preparation." The chemist was a middle-aged man of a chatty disposition. "You'll find them very efficacious."

"Miss Arundell used to take them, I remember. Miss Emily Arundell."

"Indeed she did, sir. Miss Arundell of Littlegreen House. A fine old lady, one of the old school. I used to serve her."

"Did she take many patent medicines?"

"Not really, sir. Not so many as some elderly ladies I could name. Miss Lawson, now, her companion, the one that's come into all the money—"

Poirot nodded.

"She was a one for this, that, and the other. Pills, lozenges, dyspepsia tablets, digestive mixtures, blood mixtures. Really enjoyed herself among the bottles." He smiled ruefully. "I wish there were more like her. People nowadays don't take to medicines as they used to. Still, we sell a lot of toilet preparations to make up for it."

"Did Miss Arundell take these Liver Capsules regularly?"

"Yes, she'd been taking them for three months, I think, before she died."

"A relative of hers, a Dr. Tanios, came in to have a mixture made up one day, didn't he?"

"Yes, of course, the Greek gentleman that married Miss Arundell's niece. Yes, a very interesting mixture it was. One I've not previously become acquainted with."

The man spoke as of a rare botanical trophy.

"It makes a change, sir, when you get something new. Very interesting combination of drugs, I remember. Of course, the gentleman is a doctor. Very nice he was—a pleasant way with him."

"Did his wife do any shopping here?"

"Did she now? I don't recall. Oh, yes, came in for a sleeping-draught—chloral it was, I remember. A double quantity the prescription was for. It's always

"But he talked so much to the gardener about it!"

"Not a very wise procedure if he was going to help himself to some."

Then he went on :

"What is the first and simplest poison to come into your mind if you were asked to name one quickly?"

"Arsenic, I suppose."

"Yes. You understand; then, that very marked pause before the word 'strychnine' when Charles was talking to us to-day."

"You mean—?"

"That he was about to say 'arsenic in the soup,' and stopped himself."

"Ah!" I said, "and why did he stop himself?"

"Exactly. *Why?* I may say, Hastings, that it was to find the answer to that particular 'why?' which made me go out into the garden in search of any likely source of weed-killer."

"And you found it!"

"And I found it."

I shook my head.

"It begins to look rather bad for young Charles. You had a good talk with Ellen over the old lady's illness. Did her symptoms resemble those of arsenic poisoning?"

Poirot rubbed his nose.

"It is difficult to say. There was abdominal pain—sickness."

"Of course—that's it!"

"H'm, I am not so sure."

"What poison did it resemble?"

"*Eh bien*, my friend, it resembled not so much poison as disease of the liver and death from that cause!"

"Oh, Poirot," I cried. "It *can't* be natural death! It's got to be murder!"

"Oh, *là là*, we seem to have changed places, you and I."

He turned abruptly into a chemist's shop. After a long discussion of Poirot's particular internal troubles, he purchased a small box of indigestion lozenges. Then, when his purchase was wrapped up and he was about to leave the shop, his attention was taken by an attract-

Nurse Carruthers proved to be a sensible-looking, middle-aged woman.

Poirot now appeared in yet another rôle and with one more fictitious relative. This time he had an aged mother for whom he was anxious to find a sympathetic hospital nurse.

"You comprehend—I am going to speak to you quite frankly. My mother, she is difficult. We have had some excellent nurses, young women, fully competent, but the very fact that they are young has been against them. My mother dislikes young women, she irritates them. She is rude and fractious, she fights against open windows and modern hygiene. It is very difficult." He sighed mournfully.

"I know," said Nurse Carruthers sympathetically. "It's very trying sometimes. One has to use a lot of tact. It's no use upsetting a patient. Better to give in to them as far as you can. And once they feel you're not trying to force things on them, they very often relax and give in like lambs."

"Ah I see that you would be ideal in the part. You understand old ladies."

"I've had to do with a few in my time," said Nurse Carruthers with a laugh. "You can do a lot with patience and good humour."

"That's so wise. You nursed Miss Arundell, I believe. Now, she could not have been an easy old lady."

"Oh, I don't know. She was very particular. No, I didn't find her difficult at all. Of course, I wasn't here any length of time. She died on the fourth day."

"I was talking to her niece, Miss Thomas, yesterday."

"Really. Fancy that now! What I always say for the world's a small place."

"You know her, I expect?"

"Well, of course she came down here in 1904, and she was here for the longest time of my life. I've seen her about twice when she's been staying here."

A very handsome girl."

"Yes, indeed—she was a beautiful girl."

a little difficult for us with hypnotic drugs. You see, most doctors don't prescribe much at a time."

"Whose prescription was it?"

"Her husband's, I think. Oh, of course, it was quite all *right*—but, you know, we have to be careful nowadays. Perhaps you don't know the fact, but if a doctor makes a mistake in a prescription and we make it up in all good faith and anything goes wrong it's we who have to take the blame—not the doctor."

"That seems very unfair!"

"It's worrying, I'll admit. Ah, well, I can't complain. No trouble has come *my* way—touching wood."

He rapped the counter sharply with his knuckles.

Poirot decided to buy a package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Thank you, sir. Which size—25, 50, 100?"

"I suppose the larger ones are better value—but still—"

"Have the 50, sir. That's the size Miss Arundell had. Eight and six."

Poirot agreed, paid over eight and six and received the parcel.

Then we left the shop.

"So Mrs. Tanios bought a sleeping-draught," I exclaimed as we got out into the street. "An overdose of that would kill any one, wouldn't it?"

"With the greatest of ease."

"Do you think old Miss Arundell—"

I was remembering Miss Lawson's words, "*I dare say she'd murder some one if he told her to!*"

Poirot shook his head.

"Chloral is a narcotic and a hypnotic. Used to alleviate pain and as a sleeping-draught. It can also become a habit."

"Do you think Mrs. Tanios had acquired the habit?"

Poirot shook his head perplexedly.

"No, I hardly think so. But it is curious. I can think of one explanation. But that would mean—"

He broke off and looked at his watch.

"Come, let us see if we can find this Nurse Carruthers who was with Miss Arundell in her last illness."

to looking after the old lady. We managed pretty well between us. As a matter of fact, Dr. Grainger was sending in a night nurse on the Friday, but Miss Arundell died before the night nurse arrived."

"Perhaps Miss Lawson helped to prepare some of the invalid's food?"

"No, she didn't do anything at all. There wasn't really anything to prepare. I had the Valentine and the brandy—and the Brand's and glucose and all that. All Miss Lawson did was to go about the house crying and getting in every one's way."

The nurse's tone held distinct acrimony.

"I can see," said Poirot, smiling, "that you have not a very high opinion of Miss Lawson's usefulness."

"Companions are usually a poor lot, in my opinion. They're not *trained*, you see, in any way. Just *amateurs*. And usually they're women who wouldn't be any good at anything else."

"Do you think Miss Lawson was very attached to Miss Arundell?"

"She seemed to be. Very upset and took on terribly when the old lady died. More than the relatives did, in *my* opinion," Nurse Carruthers finished with a sniff.

"Perhaps, then," said Poirot, nodding his head sagely, "Miss Arundell knew what she was doing when she left her money as she did."

"She was a very shrewd old lady," said the nurse. "There wasn't much *she* didn't take in and know about, I must say!"

"Did she mention the dog, Bob, at all?"

"It's funny you should say that! She talked about him a lot—when she was delirious. Something about his ball and a fall she'd had. A nice dog, Bob was—I'm very fond of dogs. Poor fellow, he was very miserable when she died. Wonderful, aren't they? Quite human."

And on the note of the humanity of dogs, we parted.

"There is one who has clearly no suspicions," remarked Poirot after we had left.

He sounded slightly discouraged.

Nurse Carruthers, conscious of her own comfortable plumpness, preened herself slightly.

"Of course," she said, "one shouldn't be *too* thin."

"Poor girl," continued Poirot. "I am sorry for her. *Entre nous*," he leaned forward confidentially, "her aunt's will was a great blow."

"I suppose it must have been," said Nurse Carruthers. "I know it caused a good deal of *talk*."

"I cannot imagine what induced Miss Arundell to disinherit all her family. It seems an extraordinary procedure."

"Most extraordinary. I agree with you. And, of course, people say there must have been something behind it all."

"Did you ever get any idea of the *reason*? Did old Miss Arundell say anything?"

"No. Not to me—that is."

"But to somebody else?"

"Well, I rather fancy she mentioned *something* to Miss Lawson because I heard Miss Lawson say, 'Yes, dear, but you see it's at the lawyer's.' And Miss Arundell said, 'I'm sure it's in the drawer downstairs.' And Miss Lawson said, 'No, you sent it to Mr. Purvis. Don't you remember?' And then my patient had an attack of nausea again and Miss Lawson went away while I saw to her, but I've often wondered if it was the will they were talking about."

"It certainly seems probable."

Nurse Carruthers went on :

"If so, I expect Miss Arundell was worried and perhaps wanted to alter it—but there, she was so ill, poor dear, after that—that she was past thinking of anything."

"Did Miss Lawson take part in the nursing at all?" asked Poirot.

"Oh, dear no, she was no manner of good! Too fussy, you know. She only irritated my patient."

"Did you, then, do all the nursing yourself? *C'est formidable ça.*"

"The maid—what was her name—Ellen, helped me. Ellen was very good. She was used to illness and used

"What? What's that?"

Poirot said quietly :

"Miss Arundell had a fall, did she not? A fall down the stairs shortly before her death?"

"Yes, what of it? She slipped on that damned dog's ball."

Poirot shook his head.

"No, Doctor, *she did not*. A *thread* was fastened across the top of the stairs so as to trip her up."

Dr. Grainger stared.

"Then why didn't she tell me so?" he demanded. "Never said a word to me about it."

"That is perhaps understandable—if it were a *member of her own family* who placed that thread there!"

"H'm—I see." Grainger cast a sharp glance at Poirot, then threw himself into a chair. "Well?" he said. "How did you come to be mixed up in this affair?"

"Miss Arundell wrote to me, stressing the utmost secrecy. Unfortunately the letter was delayed."

Poirot proceeded to give certain carefully edited details and explained the finding of the nail driven into the skirting-board.

The doctor listened with a grave face. His anger had abated.

"You can comprehend my position was a difficult one," Poirot finished. "I was employed, you see, by a dead woman. But I counted the obligation none the less strong for that."

Dr. Grainger's brows were drawn together in thought.

"And you've no idea who it was stretched that thread across the head of the stairs?" he asked.

"I have no *evidence* as to who it was. I will not say I have no *idea*."

"It's a nasty story," said Grainger, his face grim.

"Yes. You can understand, can you not, that to begin with I was uncertain whether there had or had not been a sequel?"

"Eh? What's that?"

"To all intents and purposes Miss Arundell died a natural death, but could one be sure of that? There had

We had a bad dinner at The George—Poirot groaning a good deal, especially over the soup.

"And it is so easy, Hastings, to make good soup. *Le pot au feu*—"

I avoided a disquisition on cookery with some difficulty.

After dinner we had a surprise.

We were sitting in the "lounge" which we had to ourselves. There had been one other man at dinner—a commercial traveller by his appearance—but he had gone out. I was just idly turning over the pages of an antiquated *Stock-Breeder's Gazette* or some such periodical when I suddenly heard Poirot's name being mentioned.

The voice in question was somewhere outside.

"Where is he? In here? Right—I can find him."

The door was flung violently open, and Dr. Grainger, his face rather red, his eyebrows working irritably, strode into the room. He paused to close the door and then advanced upon us in no uncertain fashion.

"Oh, here you are! Now then, M. Hercule Poirot, what the devil do you mean by coming round to see me and telling me a pack of lies?"

"One of the juggler's balls?" I murmured maliciously. Poirot said in his oiliest voice:

"My dear doctor, you must allow me to explain—"

"Allow you? Allow you? Damn it, I'll *force* you to explain! You're a detective, that's what you are! A nosing, prying detective! Coming round to me and feeding me up with a pack of lies about writing old General Arundell's biography! More fool me to be taken in by such a damn fool story."

"Who told you of my identity?" asked Poirot.

"Who told me? Miss Peabody told me. *She* saw through you all right!"

"Miss Peabody—yes." Poirot sounded reflective. "I rather thought—"

Dr. Grainger cut in angrily.

"Now then, sir, I'm waiting for your explanation!"

"Certainly. My explanation is very simple. *Attempted murder.*"

"Miss Arundell took these, I believe?" he said. "I suppose they could not be injurious in any way?"

"That stuff? No harm in it. *Aloes—podophyllin*—all quite mild and harmless," said Grainger. "She liked trying the stuff. I didn't mind."

He got up.

"You dispensed certain medicines for her yourself?" asked Poirot.

"Yes—a mild liver pill to be taken after food." His eyes twinkled. "She could have taken a boxful without hurting herself. I'm not given to poisoning my patients, M. Poirot."

Then, with a smile, he shook hands with us both and departed.

Poirot undid the package he had purchased at the chemist's. The medicament consisted of transparent capsules, three-quarters full of a dark brown powder.

"They look like a seasick remedy I once took," I remarked.

Poirot opened a capsule, examined its contents and tasted it gingerly with his tongue. He made a grimace.

"Well," I said, throwing myself back in my chair and yawning. "Everything seems harmless enough. Dr. Loughbarrow's specialties, and Dr. Grainger's pills! And Dr. Grainger seems definitely to negative the arsenic theory. Are you convinced at last, my stubborn Poirot?"

"It is true that I am pig-headed—that is your expression, I think? Yes, definitely I have the head of the pig," said my friend meditatively.

"Then, in spite of having the chemist, the nurse and the doctor against you, you still think that Miss Arundell was murdered?"

Poirot said quietly: "That is what I believe. No—more than believe. I am *sure* of it, Hastings."

"There's one way of proving it, I suppose," I said slowly. "Exhumation."

Poirot nodded.

"Is that the next step?"

"My friend, I have to go carefully."

"Why?"

been *one* attempt on her life. How could I be sure that there had not been a second? And this a successful one!"

Grainger nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose you are *sure*, Dr. Grainger—please do not get angry—that Miss Arundell's death *was* a natural one? I have come across certain evidence to-day—"

He detailed the conversation he had had with old Angus, Charles Arundell's interest in the weed-killer, and finally the old man's surprise at the emptiness of the tin.

Grainger listened with keen attention. When Poirot had finished he said quietly :

"I see your point. Many a case of arsenical poisoning has been diagnosed as acute gastric enteritis and a certificate given—especially when there are no suspicious contributing circumstances. In any case, arsenical poisoning presents certain difficulties—it has so many different forms. It may be acute, subacute, nervous or chronic. There may be vomiting and abdominal pain—these symptoms may be entirely absent—the person may fall suddenly to the ground and expire shortly afterwards—there may be narcotism and paralysis. The symptoms vary widely."

Poirot said :

: "*Eh bien*, taking the facts into account, what is your opinion?"

Dr. Grainger was silent for a minute or two. Then he said slowly :

"Taking everything into account, and without any bias whatever, I am of the opinion that no form of arsenical poisoning could account for the symptoms in Miss Arundell's case. She died, I am quite convinced, of yellow atrophy of the liver. I have, as you know, attended her for many years, and she has suffered previously from attacks similar to that which caused her death. That is my considered opinion, M. Poirot."

And there, perforce, the matter had to rest.

It seemed rather an anticlimax when, somewhat apologetically, Poirot produced the package of Liver Capsules he had bought at the chemist's.

own deductions, Hastings. And do not neglect the psychology—that is important. The character of the murderer—implying as it does a certain temperament in the murderer—that is an essential clue to the crime.”

“I can’t consider the character of the murderer if I don’t know who the murderer is!”

“No, no, you have not paid attention to what I have just said. If you reflect sufficiently on the character—the necessary character of the *murder*—then you will realize *who* the murderer is!”

“Do you really know, Poirot?” I asked curiously.

“I cannot say I *know* because I have no proofs. That is why I cannot say more at the present. But I am quite sure—yes, my friend, in my own mind I am very sure.”

“Well,” I said, laughing, “mind he doesn’t get *you*! That *would* be a tragedy!”

Poirot started a little. He did not take the matter as a joke. Instead he murmured: “You are right. I must be careful—extremely careful.”

“You ought to wear a coat of chain mail,” I said chaffingly. “And employ a taster in case of poison! In fact, you ought to have a regular band of gunmen to protect you!”

“*Merci*, Hastings, I shall rely on my wits.”

He then wrote a note to Miss Lawson saying that he would call at Littlegreen House at eleven o’clock.

After that we breakfasted and then strolled out into the Square. It was about a quarter past ten and a hot sleepy morning.

I was looking into the window of the antique shop at a very nice set of Hepplewhite chairs when I received a highly painful lunge in the ribs, and a sharp, penetrating voice said: “Hi!”

I spun round indignantly to find myself face to face with Miss Peabody. In her hand (the instrument of her assault upon me) was a large and powerful umbrella with a spiked point.

Apparently completely callous to the severe pain she had inflicted, she observed in a satisfied voice:

"Because," his voice dropped, "I am afraid of a second tragedy."

"You mean—?"

"I am afraid, Hastings, I am afraid. Let us leave it at that."

CHAPTER XXII

The Woman on the Stairs

On the following morning a note arrived by hand. It was in a rather weak, uncertain handwriting slanting very much uphill.

Dear M. Poirot,

I hear from Ellen that you were at Littlegreen House yesterday. I shall be much obliged if you could call and see me sometime to-day.

Yourstruly,

WILHELMINA LAWSON.

"So *she's* down here," I remarked.

"Yes."

"Why has she come, I wonder?"

Poirot smiled. "I do not suppose there is any sinister reason. After all, the house belongs to her."

"Yes, that's true, of course. You know, Poirot, that's the worst of this game of ours. Every single little thing that any one does is open to the most sinister constructions."

"It is true that I myself have enjoined upon you the motto, 'suspect every one.'"

"Are you still in that state yourself?"

"No—for me it has boiled down to this. I suspect one particular person."

"Which one?"

"Since, at the moment, it is only suspicion and there is no definite proof, I think I must leave you to draw your

"I wonder." She shot a sharp glance at him. "Something fishy about that will? Or is it something else? Going to dig Emily up? Is that it?"

Poirot did not answer.

Miss Peabody nodded her head slowly and thoughtfully as though she had received a reply.

"Often wondered," she said inconsequently, "what it would feel like.... Readin' the papers, you know—wondered if any one would ever be dug up in Market Basing. ...Didn't think it would be Emily Arundell...."

She gave him a sudden, piercing look.

"She wouldn't have liked it, you know. I suppose you've thought of that—hey?"

"Yes, I have thought of it."

"I suppose you would do—you're not a fool! Don't think you're particularly officious either."

Poirot bowed. "Thank you, mademoiselle."

"And that's more than most people would say—looking at your moustache. Why d'you have a moustache like that? D'you like it?"

I turned away convulsed with laughter.

"In England the cult of the moustache is lamentably neglected," said Poirot. His hand surreptitiously caressed the hirsute adornment.

"Oh, I see! Funny," said Miss Peabody. "Knew a woman once who had a goitre and was proud of it! Wouldn't believe that, but it's true! Well, what I say is, it's lucky when you're pleased with what the Lord has given you. It's usually the other way about."

She shook her head and sighed.

"Never thought there would be a murder in this out-of-the-world spot." Again she shot a sudden, piercing look at Poirot. "Which of 'em did it?"

"Am I to shout that to you here in the street?"

"Probably means you don't know. Or do you? Oh, well—bad blood. I'd like to know whether that Varley woman poisoned her husband or not. Makes a difference."

"You believe in heredity?"

Miss Peabody said suddenly :

"Ha! Thought it was you. Don't often make a mistake."

I said rather coldly :

"Er—good-morning. Can I do anything for you?"

"You can tell me how that friend of yours is getting on with his book—*Life of General Arundell*?"

"He hasn't actually started to write it yet," I said.

Miss Peabody indulged in a little silent but apparently satisfying laughter. She shook like a jelly. Recovering from that attack, she remarked :

"No, I don't suppose he will be starting to write it."

I said, smiling :

"So you saw through our little fiction?"

"What d'you take me for—a fool?" asked Miss Peabody.

"I saw soon enough what your downy friend was after! Wanted me to talk! Well, I didn't mind. I like talking. Hard to get any one to listen nowadays. Quite enjoyed myself that afternoon."

She cocked a shrewd eye at me.

"What's it all about, eh? What's it all about?"

I was hesitating what exactly to reply when Poirot joined us. He bowed with *empressement* to Miss Peabody.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle. Enchanted to encounter you."

"Good-morning," said Miss Peabody. "What are you this morning, Parotti or Poirot—eh?"

"It was very clever of you to pierce my disguise so rapidly," said Poirot, smiling.

"Wasn't much disguise to pierce! Not many like you about, are there? Don't know if that's a good thing or a bad one. Difficult to say."

"I prefer, mademoiselle, to be unique."

"You've got your wish, I should say," said Miss Peabody drily. "Now then, Mr. Poirot, I gave you all the gossip you wanted the other day. Now it's my turn to ask questions. What's it all about? Eh? What's it all about?"

"Are you not asking a question to which you already know the answer?"

"I hope you'll excuse my coming in like this, M. Poirot. I've been going through some locked-up cupboards—so many things—old people are inclined to *hoard* a little, I'm afraid—dear Miss Arundell was no exception—and one gets so much dust in one's *hair*—astonishing, you know, the things people collect—if you can believe me, two dozen needlebooks—actually, two dozen."

"You mean that Miss Arundell had bought two dozen needlebooks?"

"Yes, and put them away and forgot about them—and, of course, now the needles are all rusty—such a pity. She used to give them to the maids as Christmas presents."

"She was very forgetful—yes?"

"Oh, *very*. Especially in the way of putting things away. Like a dog with a bone, you know. That's what we used to call it between us. 'Now don't go and dog and bone it,' I used to say to her."

She laughed and then producing a small handkerchief from her pocket suddenly began to sniff.

"Oh, dear," she said tearfully. "It seems so dreadful of me to be laughing here."

"You have too much sensibility," said Poirot. "You feel things too much."

"That's what my mother always used to say to me, M. Poirot. 'You take things to heart too much, Mina,' she used to say. It's a great drawback, M. Poirot, to be so sensitive. Especially when one has one's living to get."

"Ah, yes, indeed, but that is all a thing of the past. You are now your own mistress. You can enjoy yourself—travel—you have absolutely no worries or anxieties."

"I suppose that's true," said Miss Lawson rather doubtfully.

"Assuredly it is true. Now talking of Miss Arundell's forgetfulness I see how it was that her letter to me never reached me for so long a time."

He explained the circumstances of the finding of the letter. A red spot showed in Miss Lawson's cheek. She said:

"I'd rather it was Tanios. An outsider! But wishes ain't horses, worse luck. Well, I'll be getting along I can see you're not goin' to tell me anything.... Who are you actin' for, by the way?"

Poirot said gravely :

"I am acting for the dead, mademoiselle."

I am sorry to say that Miss Peabody received this remark with a sudden shriek of laughter. Quickly subduing her mirth she said :

"Excuse me. It sounded like Isabel Tripp—that's all! What an awful woman! Julia's worse, I think. So painfully girlish. Never did like mutton dressed lamb-fashion. Well, good-bye. Seen Dr. Grainger at all?"

"Mademoiselle, I have the bone to pick with you. You betrayed my secret."

Miss Peabody indulged in her peculiar throaty chuckle.

"Men are simple! He'd swallowed that preposterous tissue of lies you told him. Wasn't he mad when I told him! Went away snorting with rage! He's looking for you."

"He found me last night."

"Oh! I wish I'd been there."

"I wish you had, mademoiselle," said Poirot gallantly.

Miss Peabody laughed and prepared to waddle away. She addressed me over her shoulder.

"Good-bye, young man. Don't you go buying those chairs. They're a fake."

She moved off, chuckling.

"That," said Poirot, "is a very clever old woman."

"Even although she did not admire your moustaches?"

"Taste is one thing," said Poirot coldly. "Brains are another."

We passed into the shop and spent a pleasant twenty minutes looking round. We emerged unscathed in pocket and proceeded in the direction of Littlegreen House.

Ellen, rather redder in the face than usual, admitted us and showed us into the drawing-room. Presently footsteps were heard descending the stairs and Miss Lawson came in. She seemed somewhat out of breath and flustered. Her hair was pinned up in a silk handkerchief.

"I have permitted you to remain under a misapprehension, I am afraid. You assumed that the letter I received from Miss Arundell concerned itself with the question of a small sum of money abstracted by—in all possibility—Mr. Charles Arundell."

Miss Lawson nodded.

"But that, you see, was not the case.... In fact, the first I heard of the stolen money was from you.... Miss Arundell wrote to me on the subject of her accident."

"Her accident?"

"Yes, she had a fall downstairs, I understand."

"Oh, quite—quite—" Miss Lawson looked bewildered. She stared vacantly at Poirot. She went on. "But—I'm sorry—I'm sure it's very stupid of me—but why should she write to *you*? I understand—in fact, I think you said so—that you are a detective. You're not a—a doctor too? Or a faith healer, perhaps?"

"No, I am not a doctor—nor a faith healer. But, like the doctor, I concern myself sometimes with so-called accidental deaths."

"With accidental deaths?"

"With *so-called* accidental deaths, I said. It is true that Miss Arundell did not *die*—but she might have died!"

"Oh, dear me, yes, the doctor said so, but I don't understand—"

Miss Lawson sounded still bewildered.

"The cause of the accident was supposed to be the ball of the little Bob, was it not?"

"Yes, yes, that was it. It was Bob's ball."

"Oh, no, it was not Bob's ball."

"But, excuse me, Mr. Poirot, I saw it there myself—as we all ran down."

"You saw it—yes, perhaps. But *it was not the cause of the accident. The cause of the accident, Miss Lawson, was a dark-coloured thread stretched about a foot above the top of the stairs!*"

"But—but a dog couldn't—"

"Exactly," said Poirot quickly. "A dog could not do that—he is not sufficiently intelligent—or, if you like,

"Ellen should have told *me*! To send that letter to you without a word was great impertinence! She should have consulted me first. *Great* impertinence I call it! Not one word did I hear about the whole thing. Disgraceful!"

"Oh, my dear lady, I am sure it was done in all good faith."

"Well, I think it was very *peculiar* myself! Very peculiar! Servants really do the oddest things. Ellen should have remembered that I am the mistress of the house now."

She drew herself up importantly.

"Ellen was very devoted to her mistress, was she not?" said Poirot.

"Yes, I dare say, but that makes no difference. She should have been *told*!"

"The important thing is—that I received the letter," said Poirot.

"Oh, I agree that it's no good making a fuss after things have happened, but all the same I think Ellen ought to be told that she mustn't take it upon herself to do things without asking first!"

She stopped, a red spot on each cheekbone.

Poirot was silent for a minute, then he said:-

"You wanted to see me to-day? In what way can I be of service to you?"

Miss Lawson's annoyance subsided as promptly as it had arisen. She began to be flustered and incoherent again.

"Well, really—you see, I just *wondered*... Well, to tell the truth, M. Poirot, I arrived down here yesterday and, of course, Ellen told me you had been here, and I just wondered—well, as you hadn't *mentioned* to me that you were coming—Well, it seemed rather *odd*—and I couldn't see—"

"You could not see what I was doing down here?" Poirot finished for her.

"I—well—no, that's exactly it. I couldn't."

She looked at him, flushing but inquiring.

"I must make a little confession to you," said Poirot.

he is not sufficiently *evil*.... A human being put that thread in position...."

Miss Lawson's face had gone deadly white. She raised a shaking hand to her face.

"Oh, Mr. Poirot—I can't believe it—you don't mean—but that is awful—really awful. You mean it was done on purpose?"

"Yes, it was done on purpose."

"But that's dreadful. It's almost like—like killing a person."

"If it had succeeded it *would* have been killing a person! In other words—it would have been murder!"

Miss Lawson gave a little shrill cry.

Poirot went on in the same grave tone.

"A nail was driven into the skirting-board so that the thread could be attached. That nail was varnished so as not to show. Tell me, do you ever remember a smell of varnish that you could not account for?"

Miss Lawson gave a cry.

"Oh, how extraordinary! To think of that! Why, of course! And to think I never thought—never dreamed—but then, how could I? And yet it did seem odd to me at the time."

Poirot leant forward.

"So—you can help us, mademoiselle. Once again you can help us. *C'est épatant!*"

"To think that was it! Oh, well, it all fits in."

"Tell me, I pray of you. You smelt varnish—yes?"

"Yes. Of course, I didn't know what it was. I thought—dear me—is it paint—no, it's more like floor stain, and then, of course, I thought I must have *imagined* it."

"When was this?"

"Now let me see—when was it?"

"Was it during that Easter week-end when the house was full of guests?"

"Yes, that was the time—but I'm trying to recall just which day it was.... Now, let me see, it wasn't Sunday. No, and it wasn't on Tuesday—that was the night Dr. Donaldson came to dinner. And on the Wednesday

Poirot reached up, detached the bulb and examined it.

"A forty-watt lamp, I see. Not very powerful."

"No, it was just so that the passage shouldn't be quite dark."

Poirot retraced his steps to the top of the stairs.

"You will pardon me, mademoiselle, but with the light being fairly dim and the way that shadow falls it is hardly possible that you can have seen very clearly. Can you be positive it was Miss Theresa Arundell and not just an indeterminate female figure in a dressing-gown?"

Miss Lawson was indignant.

"No, indeed, M. Poirot! I'm *perfectly* sure! I know Theresa well enough, I should hope! Oh, it was her all right. Her dark dressing-gown and that big shining brooch she wears with the initials—I saw that plainly."

"So that there is no possible doubt. You saw the initials?"

"Yes, T. A. I know the brooch. Theresa often wore it. Oh, yes, I could swear to its being Theresa—and I will swear to it if necessary!"

There was a firmness and decision in those last two sentences that was quite at variance with her usual manner.

Poirot looked at her. Again there was something in his glance. It was aloof, appraising—and had also a queer appearance of finality about it.

"You would swear to that, yes?" he said.

"If—if—it's necessary. But I suppose it—will it be necessary?"

Again Poirot turned that appraising glance upon her.

"That will depend on the result of the exhumation," he said.

"Ex-exhumation?"

Poirot put out a restraining hand. In her excitement Miss Lawson very nearly went headlong down the stairs.

"It may possibly be a question of exhumation," he said.

"Oh, but surely—how *very* unpleasant! But I mean, I'm sure the family would oppose the idea very strongly—very strongly indeed."

"Probably they will."

"The tap that aroused you would be the tap of the hammer on the nail," mused Poirot.

"Yes, I suppose it would. But oh, M. Poirot, how dreadful—how truly dreadful. I've always felt Theresa was, perhaps, a little *wild*, but to do a thing like that—"

"You are sure it was Theresa?"

"Oh, dear me, yes."

"It couldn't have been Mrs. Tanios or one of the maids, for instance?"

"Oh, no, it was Theresa."

Miss Lawson shook her head and murmured to herself, "Oh, dear, oh, dear," several times.

Poirot was staring at her in a way I found it hard to understand.

"Permit me," he said suddenly, "to make an experiment. Let us go upstairs and endeavour to reconstruct this little scene."

"Reconstruct? Oh, really—I don't know—I mean I don't quite see—"

"I will show you," said Poirot, cutting in upon these doubts in an authoritative manner.

Somewhat flustered, Miss Lawson led the way upstairs.

"I hope the room's tidy—so much to do—what with one thing and another—" She tailed off incoherently.

The room was indeed somewhat heavily littered with miscellaneous articles, obviously the result of Miss Lawson's turning out of cupboards. With her usual incoherence Miss Lawson managed to indicate her own position and Poirot was able to verify for himself the fact that a portion of the staircase was reflected in the wall-mirror.

"And now, mademoiselle," he suggested, "if you will be so good as to go out and reproduce the actions that you saw."

Miss Lawson, still murmuring, "Oh, dear—" bustled out to fulfil her part. Poirot acted the part of observer.

The performance concluded, he went out on the landing and asked which electric light had been left switched on.

"This one—this one along here. Just outside Miss Arundell's door."

"And you can also swear that you saw a halo of light round Miss Arundell's head during the *séance*?"

Miss Lawson's mouth fell open.

"Oh, M. Poirot, don't—don't joke about these things."

"I am not joking. I am perfectly serious."

Miss Lawson said with dignity :

"It wasn't exactly a halo. It was more like the beginning of a manifestation. A ribbon of some luminous material. I think it was beginning to form into a face."

"Extremely interesting. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle, and please keep all this to yourself."

"Oh, of course—of course. I shouldn't dream of doing anything else...."

The last we saw of Miss Lawson was her rather sheep-like face gazing after us from the front-door step.

CHAPTER XXIII

Dr. Tanios Calls on Us

No sooner had we left the house than Poirot's manner changed. His face was grim and set.

"*Dépêchons nous*, Hastings," he said. "We must get back to London as soon as possible."

"I'm willing." I quickened my pace to suit his. I stole a look at his grave face.

"Who do you suspect, Poirot?" I asked. "I wish you'd tell me. Do you believe it was Theresa Arundell on the stairs or not?"

Poirot did not reply to my question. Instead he asked a question of his own.

"Did it strike you—reflect before you answer—did it strike you that there was something *wrong* with that statement, of Miss Lawson's?"

"How do you mean—wrong with it?"

"If I knew that I should not be asking you!"

"Yes, but wrong in what way?"

"That is just it. I cannot be precise. But as she

"I'm quite sure they won't hear of such a thing!"

"Ah, but if it is an order from the Home Office."

"But, M. Poirot—*why?* I mean it's not as though—not as though—"

"Not as though what?"

"Not as though there were anything—*wrong.*"

"You think not?"

"No, of course not. Why, there *couldn't* be! I mean the doctor and the nurse and everything—"

"Do not upset yourself," said Poirot calmly and soothingly.

"Oh, but I can't help it! Poor dear Miss Arundell! It's not even as though Theresa had been here in the house when she died."

"No, she left on the Monday before she was taken ill, did she not?"

"Quite early in the morning. So you see, *she* can't have had anything to do with it!"

"Let us hope not," said Poirot.

"Oh, dear." Miss Lawson clasped her hands together. "I've never known *anything* so dreadful as all this! Really, I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels."

Poirot glanced at his watch.

"We must depart. We are returning to London. And you, mademoiselle, you are remaining down here some little time?"

"No—no.... I have really no settled plans. Actually I'm going back myself to-day.... I only came down just for a night to—to settle things a little."

"I see. Well, good-bye, mademoiselle, and forgive me if I have upset you at all."

"Oh, M. Poirot. Upset me? I feel quite ill! Oh, dear—oh, dear. It's such a *wicked* world! Such a dreadfully wicked world."

Poirot cut short her lamentations by taking her hand firmly in his.

"Quite so. And you are still ready to swear *that you saw Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Bank Holiday?*"

"Oh, yes, I can swear to that."

We could say no more just then, as the waiter arrived with the bill.

On the way to London we talked very little. I am not fond of talking and driving, and Poirot was so busy protecting his moustaches with his muffler from the disastrous effects of wind and dust that speech was quite beyond him.

We arrived at the flat at about twenty to two.

George, Poirot's immaculate and extremely English manservant, opened the door.

"A Dr. Tanios is waiting to see you, sir. He has been here for half an hour."

"Dr. Tanios? Where is he?"

"In the sitting-room, sir. A lady also called to see you, sir. She seemed very distressed to find you were absent from home. It was before I received your telephone message, sir, so I could not tell her when you would be returning to London."

"Describe this lady."

"She was about five-foot-seven, sir, with dark hair and light blue eyes. She was wearing a grey coat and skirt and a hat worn very much to the back of the head instead of over the right eye."

"Mrs. Tanios," I ejaculated in a low voice.

"She seemed in a condition of great nervous excitement, sir. Said it was of the utmost importance she should find you quickly."

"What time was this?"

"About half-past ten, sir."

Poirot shook his head as he passed on towards the sitting-room.

"That is the second time I have missed hearing what Mrs. Tanios has to say. What would you say, Hastings? Is there a fate in it?"

"Third time lucky," I said consolingly.

Poirot shook his head doubtfully.

"Will there be a third time? I wonder. Come, let us hear what the husband has to say."

Dr. Tanios was sitting in an armchair reading one of Poirot's books on psychology. He sprang up and greeted us.

was talking I had, somehow, a feeling of unreality... as though there was something—some small point that was wrong—that was, yes, that was the feeling—something that was *impossible*....”

“She seemed quite positive it was Theresa!”

“Yes, yes.”

“But after all, the light couldn't have been very good. I don't see how she can be quite so sure.”

“No, no, Hastings, you are not helping me. It was some small point—something connected with—yes, I am sure of it—with the bedroom.”

“With the bedroom?” I repeated, trying to recall the details of the room. “No,” I said at last. “I can't help you.”

Poirot shook his head vexedly.

“Why did you bring up that spiritualistic business again?” I asked.

“Because it is important.”

“What is important? Miss Lawson's luminous ‘ribbon development’?”

“You remember the Misses Tripp's description of the *séance*?”

“I know they saw a halo round the old lady's head.” I laughed in spite of myself. “I shouldn't think she was a saint by all accounts! Miss Lawson seems to have been terrified by her. I felt quite sorry for the poor woman when she described how she lay awake, worried to death because she might get into trouble over ordering too small a sirloin of beef.”

“Yes, it was an interesting touch that.”

“What are we going to do when we get to London?” I asked as we turned into The George and Poirot asked for the bill.

“We must go and see Theresa Arundell immediately.”

“And find out the truth? But won't she deny the whole thing anyway?”

“*Mon cher*, it is not a criminal offence to kneel upon a flight of stairs! She may have been picking up a pin to bring her luck—something of that sort!”

“And the smell of varnish?”

"You can understand my anxiety!"

"Naturally. Naturally. But what I do not quite understand is why you have come to me. How can I help you?"

Dr. Tanios seemed a little embarrassed.

"It occurred to me that my wife might have—or may yet—come to you with some extraordinary tale. She may conceivably say that she is in danger from me—something of that kind."

"But why should she come to *me*?"

Dr. Tanios smiled—it was a charming smile—genial yet wistful.

"You are a celebrated detective, M. Poirot. I saw—I could see at once—that my wife was very impressed at meeting you yesterday. The mere fact of meeting a detective would make a powerful impression on her in her present state. It seems to me highly probable that she might seek you out and—and—well, confide in you. That is the way these nervous affections go! There is a tendency to turn against those nearest and dearest to you."

"Very distressing."

"Yes, indeed. I am very fond of my wife." There was a rich tenderness in his voice. "I always feel it was so brave of her to marry me—a man of another race—to come out to a far country—to leave all her own friends and surroundings. For the last few days I have been really distraught... I can see only one thing for it..."

"Yes?"

"Perfect rest and quiet—and suitable psychological treatment. There is a splendid home I know of run by a first-class man. I want to take her down there—it is in Norfolk—straight away. Perfect rest and isolation from outside influence—that is what is needed. I feel convinced that once she has been there a month or two under skilled treatment there will be a change for the better."

"I see," said Poirot.

He uttered the words in a matter-of-fact manner without any clue to the feelings that prompted him.

"You must forgive this intrusion. I hope you don't mind my forcing my way in and waiting for you like this."
"*Du tout, du tout.* Pray sit down. Permit me to offer you a glass of sherry."

"Thank you. As a matter of fact, I have an excuse. M. Poirot, I am worried, terribly worried about my wife."

"About your wife? I'm very sorry. What's the matter?"

Tanios said: "You have seen her perhaps, lately?"
It seemed quite a natural question, but the quick look that accompanied it was not so natural.

Poirot replied in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"No, not since I saw her at the hotel with you yesterday."

"Ah—I thought perhaps she might have called upon you." Poirot was busy pouring out three glasses of sherry.

He said in a slightly abstracted voice:

"No. Was there any—reason for her calling on me?"

"No, no." Dr. Tanios accepted his sherry. "Thank you. Thank you very much. No, there was no exact reason, but, to be frank, I am very much concerned about my wife's state of health."

"Ah, she is not strong?"

"Her bodily health," said Tanios slowly, "is good. I wish I could say the same for her mind."

"Ah?"

"I fear, M. Poirot, that she is on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown."

"My dear Dr. Tanios, I am extremely sorry to hear this."

"This condition has been growing for some time. During the last two months her manner towards me has completely changed. She is nervous, easily startled, and she has the oddest fancies—actually they are more than fancies—they are *delusions*!"

"Really?"

"Yes. She is suffering from what is commonly known as persecution mania—a fairly well-known condition."

Poirot made a sympathetic noise with his tongue.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"She is probably highly suspicious of anything you give her to eat or drink. Probably suspects you of wanting to poison her?"

"Dear me, M. Poirot, you are quite right. You know something of such cases, then?"

"One comes across them now and then in my profession, naturally. But do not let me detain you. You may find her waiting for you at the hotel."

"True. I hope I shall. I feel terribly anxious."

He hurried out of the room.

Poirot went swiftly to the telephone. He flicked over the pages of the telephone directory and asked for a number.

"'Allo—'allo—is that the Durham Hotel? Can you tell me if Mrs. Tanios is in? What? T-A-N-I-O-S. Yes, that is right. Yes? Yes? Oh, I see."

He replaced the receiver.

"Mrs. Tanios left the hotel this morning early. She returned at eleven, waited in the taxi whilst her luggage was brought down and drove away with it."

"Does Tanios know she took away her luggage?"

"I think not as yet."

"Where has she gone?"

"Impossible to tell."

"Do you think she will come back here?"

"Possibly. I cannot tell."

"Perhaps she will write."

"Perhaps."

"What can we do?"

Poirot shook his head. He looked worried and distressed.

"Nothing at the moment. A hasty lunch and then we will go and see Theresa Arundell."

"Do you believe it was her on the stairs?"

"Impossible to tell. One thing I made sure of—Miss Lawson could not have seen her face. She saw a tall figure in a dark dressing-gown, that is all."

"And the brooch?"

"My dear friend, a brooch is not a part of a person's

Tanios again shot a quick glance at him.

"That is why, if she should come to you, I should be obliged if you will let me know at once."

"But certainly. I will telephone you. You are at the Durham Hotel still?"

"Yes. I am going back there now."

"And your wife is not there?"

"She went out directly after breakfast."

"Without telling you where she was going?"

"Without saying a word. That is most unlike her."

"And the children?"

"She took them with her."

"I see."

Tanios got up.

"Thank you so much, M. Poirot. I need hardly say that if she does tell you any high-flown stories of intimidation and persecution, pay no attention to them. It is, unfortunately, a part of her malady."

"Most distressing," said Poirot with sympathy.

"It is indeed. Although one knows, medically speaking, that it is part of a recognized mental disease, yet one cannot help being hurt when a person very near and dear to you turns against you and all their affection changes to dislike."

"You have my deepest sympathy," said Poirot as he shook hands with his guest.

"By the way—" Poirot's voice recalled Tanios just as he was at the door.

"Yes?"

"Do you ever prescribe chloral for your wife?"

Tanios gave a startled movement.

"I—no—at least I may have done. But not lately. She seems to have taken an aversion to any form of sleeping-draught."

"Ah! I suppose because she does not trust you?"

"M. Poirot!"

Tanios came striding forward angrily.

"That would be part of the disease," said Poirot smoothly.

Tanios stopped.

Theresa laughed. "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm always three-quarters of an hour late for everything. I might just as well make it an hour."

She led him into the sitting-room. To my surprise Dr. Donaldson rose from a chair by the window.

"You've met M. Poirot already, Rex, haven't you?"

"We met at Market Basing," said Donaldson stiffly.

"You were pretending to write the life of my drunken grandfather, I understand," said Theresa. "Rex, my angel, will you leave us?"

"Thank you, Theresa, but I think that from every point of view it would be advisable for me to be present at this interview."

There was a brief duel of eyes. Theresa's were commanding. Donaldson's were impervious. She showed a quick flash of anger.

"All right, stay then, damn you!"

Mr. Donaldson seemed unperturbed.

He seated himself again in the chair by the window, laying down his book on the arm of it. It was a book on the pituitary gland, I noticed.

Theresa sat down on her favourite low stool and looked impatiently at Poirot.

"Well, you've seen Purvis? What about it?"

Poirot said in a non-committal voice :

"There are—possibilities, mademoiselle."

She looked at him thoughtfully. Then she sent a very faint glance in the direction of the doctor. It was, I think, intended as a warning to Poirot.

"But it would be well, I think," went on Poirot, "for me to report later when my plans are more advanced."

A faint smile showed for a minute on Theresa's face.

Poirot continued :

"I have to-day come from Market Basing and while there I have talked to Miss Lawson. Tell me, mademoiselle, did you on the night of April 13th (that was the night of the Easter Bank Holiday) kneel upon the stairs after every one had gone to bed?"

"My dear Hercule Poirot, what an extraordinary question. Why should I?"

anatomy! It can be detached from that person. I can be lost—or borrowed—or even stolen."

"In other words, you don't want to believe Theresa Arundell guilty?"

"I want to hear what she has to say on the matter."

"And if Mrs. Tanios comes back?"

"I will arrange for that."

George brought in an omelette.

"Listen, George," said Poirot. "If that lady comes back, you will ask her to wait. If Dr. Tanios comes while she is here, on no account let him in. If he asks if his wife is here, you will tell him she is not. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

Poirot attacked the omelette.

"This business complicates itself," he said. "We must step very carefully. If not—the murderer will strike again."

"If he did you might get him."

"Quite possibly, but I prefer the life of the innocent to the conviction of the guilty. We must go very, very carefully."

CHAPTER XXIV

Theresa's Denial

We found Theresa Arundell just preparing to go out. She was looking extraordinarily attractive. A small hat of the most outrageous fashion descended rakishly over one eye. I recognized with momentary amusement that Bella Tanios had worn a cheap imitation of such a hat yesterday and had worn it—as George had put it—on the back of the head instead of over the right eye. I remembered well how she had pushed it further and further back on her untidy hair.

Poirot said politely :

"Can I have just a minute or two, mademoiselle, or will it delay you too much?"

Theresa found her voice.

"She says *I* did it, does she?"

Poirot did not answer except by bending his head a little.

"Well, it's a lie! I had nothing to do with it!"

"You were kneeling on the stairs for quite another reason?"

"I wasn't kneeling on the stairs at all!"

"Be careful, mademoiselle."

"I wasn't there! I never came out of my room after I went to bed on any evening I was there."

"Miss Lawson recognized you."

"It was probably Bella Tanios or one of the maids she saw."

"She says it was you."

"She's a damned liar!"

"She recognized your dressing-gown and a brooch you wear."

"A brooch—what brooch?"

"A brooch with your initials."

"Oh, I know the one! What a circumstantial liar she is!"

"You still deny that it was you she saw?"

"If it's my word against hers—"

"You are a better liar than she is—eh?"

Theresa said calmly:

"That's probably quite true. But in this case I'm speaking the truth. I wasn't preparing a booby trap or saying my prayers, or picking up gold or silver, or doing anything at all on the stairs."

"Have you this brooch that was mentioned?"

"Probably. Do you want to see it?"

"If you please, mademoiselle."

Theresa got up and left the room. There was an awkward silence. Dr. Donaldson looked at Poirot much as I imagined he might have looked at an anatomical specimen.

Theresa returned. "Here it is."

She almost flung the ornament at Poirot. It was a large rather showy chromium or stainless steel brooch

"The question, mademoiselle, is not why you *should*, but whether you *did*."

"I'm sure I don't know. I should think it most unlikely."

"You comprehend, mademoiselle, Miss Lawson *says* you *did*."

Theresa shrugged her attractive shoulders.

"Does it matter?"

"It matters very much."

She stared at him in a perfectly amiable fashion. Poirot stared back.

"Loopy!" said Theresa.

"Pardon?"

"Definitely loopy!" said Theresa. "Don't you think so, Rex?"

Dr. Donaldson coughed.

"Excuse me, M. Poirot, but what is the point of the question?"

My friend spread out his hands.

"It is most simple! Some one drove in a nail in a convenient position at the head of the stairs. The nail was just touched with brown varnish to match the skirt-board."

"Is this a new kind of witchcraft?" asked Theresa.

"No, mademoiselle, it is much more homely and simple than that. On the following evening, the Tuesday, *some one* attached a string or thread from the nail to the balusters with the result that when Miss Arundell came out of her room she caught her foot in it and went head-long down the stairs."

Theresa drew in her breath sharply.

"That was Bob's ball!"

"Pardon, it was not."

There was a pause. It was broken by Donaldson, who said in his quiet, precise voice :

"Excuse me, but what evidence have you in support of this statement?"

Poirot said quietly :

"The evidence of the nail, the evidence of Miss Arundell's own written words, and finally the evidence of Miss Lawson's eyes."

"I do like modesty," said Theresa, pinning the brooch on carelessly.

She looked up at him.

"Anything more? I ought to be going."

"Nothing that cannot be discussed later."

Theresa moved towards the door. Poirot went on in a quiet voice :

"There is a question of exhumation, it is true—"

Theresa stopped dead. The brooch fell from her hand to the ground.

"What's that?"

Poirot said clearly :

"It is possible that the body of Miss Emily Arundell may be exhumed."

Theresa stood still, her hands clenched. She said in a low, angry voice :

"Is this *your* doing? It can't be done without an application from the family!"

"You are wrong, mademoiselle. It can be done on an order from the Home Office."

"My God!" said Theresa.

She turned and walked swiftly up and down.

Donaldson said quietly :

"I really don't see that there is any need to be so upset, Tessa. I dare say that to an outsider the idea is not very pleasant, but—"

She interrupted him.

"Don't be a fool, Rex!"

Poirot asked :

"The idea disturbs you, mademoiselle?"

"Of course it does! It isn't decent. Poor old Aunt Emily. Why the devil *should* she be exhumed?"

"I presume," said Donaldson, "that there is some doubt as to the cause of death?" He looked inquiringly at Poirot. He went on. "I confess that I am surprised. I think that there is no doubt that Miss Arundell died a natural death from a disease of long standing."

"You told me something about a rabbit and liver trouble once," said Theresa. "I've forgotten it now, but you infect a rabbit with blood from a person with yellow

with T. A. enclosed in a circle. I had to admit that it was large enough and showy enough to be easily seen in Miss Lawson's mirror.

"I never wear it now. I'm tired of it," said Theresa. "London's been flooded with them. Every little skivvy wears one."

"But it was expensive when you bought it?"

"Oh, yes. They were quite exclusive to begin with."

"When was that?"

"Last Christmas, I think it was. Yes, about then."

"Have you ever lent it to any one?"

"No."

"You had it with you at Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I did. Yes, I did. I remember."

"Did you leave it about at all? Was it out of your possession while you were there?"

"No, it wasn't. I wore it on a green jumper, I remember. And I wore the same jumper every day."

"And at night?"

"It was still in the jumper."

"And the jumper?"

"Oh, hell, the jumper was sitting on a chair."

"You are sure no one removed the brooch and put it back again the next day?"

"We'll say so in court if you like—if you think that's the best lie to tell! Actually I'm *quite* sure that nothing like that happened! It's a pretty idea that somebody framed me—but I don't think it's true."

Poirot frowned. Then he got up, attached the brooch carefully to his coat lapel and approached a mirror on a table at the other end of the room. He stood in front of it and then moved slowly backward, getting an effect of distance.

Then he uttered a grunt.

"Imbecile that I am! Of course!"

He came back and handed the brooch to Theresa with a bow.

"You are quite right, mademoiselle. The brooch did *not* leave your possession! I have been regrettably dense."

He said very clearly :

"That man means mischief."

Poirot grinned suddenly. He drew me through the front door.

"Come, St. Leonards," he said. "*C'est drôle, ça!*"

Personally I thought the joke a particularly stupid one.

CHAPTER XXV

I Lie back and Reflect

No, I thought, as I hurried after Poirot, there was no doubt about it now. Miss Arundell had been murdered and Theresa knew it. But was she herself the criminal or was there another explanation?

She was afraid—yes. But was she afraid for herself or for some one else? Could that some one be the quiet, precise young doctor with the calm, aloof manner?

Had the old lady died of genuine disease *artificially induced*?

Up to a point it all fitted in—Donaldson's ambitions, his belief that Theresa would inherit money at her aunt's death. Even the fact that he had been at dinner there on the evening of the accident. How easy to leave a convenient window open and return in the dead of night to tie the murderous thread across the staircase. But then, what about the placing of the nail in position?

No, Theresa must have done that. Theresa, his fiancée and accomplice. With the two of them working it together, the whole thing seemed clear enough. In that case it was probably Theresa who had actually placed the thread in position. The *first* crime, the crime that failed, had been *her* work. The second crime, the crime that had succeeded, was Donaldson's more scientific masterpiece.

Yes—it all fitted in.

Yet even now there were loose strands. Why had Theresa blurted out those facts about inducing liver disease

atrophy of the liver, and then you inject that rabbit's blood into another rabbit, and then that second rabbit's blood into a person and the person gets a diseased liver. Something like that."

"That was merely an illustration of serum therapeutics," said Donaldson patiently.

"Pity there are so many rabbits in the story!" said Theresa with a reckless laugh. "None of us keep rabbits." She turned on Poirot and her voice altered.

"M. Poirot, is this *true*?" she asked.

"It is true enough, but—there are ways of avoiding such a contingency, mademoiselle."

"Then avoid it!" Her voice sank almost to a whisper. It was urgent, compelling. "Avoid it *at all costs*!"

Poirot rose to his feet.

"Those are your instructions?" His voice was formal.

"Those are my instructions."

"But, Tessa—" Donaldson interrupted.

She whirled round on her fiancé.

"Be quiet! She was *my* aunt, wasn't she? Why should *my* aunt be dug up? Don't you know there will be paragraphs in the papers and gossip and general unpleasantness?" She swung round again on Poirot.

"You must stop it! I give you *carte blanche*. Do anything you like, but *stop it*!"

Poirot bowed formally.

"I will do what I can. *Au revoir, mademoiselle, au revoir, Doctor.*"

"Oh, go away!" cried Theresa. "And take St. Leonards with you. I wish I'd never set eyes on either of you."

We left the room. Poirot did not this time deliberately place his ear to the crack, but he dallied—yes, he dallied.

And not in vain. Theresa's voice rose clear and defiant:

"Don't look at me like that, Rex."

And then suddenly, with a break in her voice: "Darling."

Dr. Donaldson's precise voice answered her.

We had just reached the flat.

George opened the door to us. In reply to Poirot's anxious question he shook his head.

"No, sir, Mrs. Tanios has not called. Neither has she telephoned."

Poirot went into the sitting-room. He paced up and down for a few moments. Then he picked up the telephone. He got first on to the Durham Hotel.

"Yes—yes, please. Ah, Dr. Tanios, this is Hercule Poirot speaking. Your wife has returned? Oh, not returned. Dear me.... Taken her luggage you say.... And the children.... You have no idea where she has gone.... Yes, quite.... Oh, perfectly.... If my professional services are of any use to you? I have a certain experience in these matters.... Such things can be done quite discreetly.... No, of course not.... Yes, of course that is true.... Certainly—certainly. I shall respect your wishes in the matter."

He hung up the receiver thoughtfully.

"He does not know where she is," he said thoughtfully. "I think that is quite genuine. The anxiety in his voice is unmistakable. He does not want to go to the police; that is understandable. Yes, I understand that. He does not want my assistance either. That is, perhaps not quite so understandable.... He wants her found—but he does not want *me* to find her.... No, definitely he does not want me to find her... He seems confident that he can manage the matter himself. He does not think she can remain long hidden, for she has very little money with her. Also she has the children. Yes, I fancy he will be able to hunt her down not long. But, I think, Hastings, that we shall be a little quicker than he is. It is important, I think we should be."

"Do you think it's true that she is ~~still~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~house~~?" I asked.

"I think that she is in a highly ~~unpleasant~~ ~~condition~~ condition."

"But not to such a point that she ~~has~~ ~~lost~~ ~~her~~ ~~mind~~ mental home?"

in human beings? It was almost as though she did not realize the truth.... But in that case—and I felt my mind growing bewildered, and I interrupted my speculations to ask :

"Where are we going, Poirot?"

"Back to my flat. It is possible that we may find Mrs. Tanios there."

My thoughts switched off on a different track.

Mrs. Tanios! That was another mystery! If Donaldson and Theresa were guilty, where did Mrs. Tanios and her smiling husband come in? What did the woman want to tell Poirot and what was Tanios's anxiety to prevent her doing so?

"Poirot," I said humbly, "I'm getting rather muddled. They're not *all* in it, are they?"

"Murder by a syndicate? A family syndicate? No, not this time. There is the mark of one brain and one brain only in this. The psychology is very clear."

"You mean that either Theresa or Donaldson did it—but not *both* of them? Did he get her to hammer that nail in on some entirely innocent pretext, then?"

"My dear friend, from the moment I heard Miss Lawson's story I realized that there were three possibilities : (1) That Miss Lawson was telling the exact truth. (2) That Miss Lawson had invented the story for reasons of her own. (3) That Miss Lawson actually believed her own story, but that her identification rested upon the brooch—and as I have already pointed out to you—a brooch is easily detachable from its owner."

"Yes, but Theresa insists that the brooch did not leave her possession."

"And she is perfectly right. I had overlooked a small but intensely significant fact."

"Very unlike you, Poirot," I said solemnly.

"*N'est-ce pas?* But one has one's lapses."

"Age will tell!"

"Age has nothing to do with it," said Poirot coldly.

"Well, what is the significant fact?" I asked as we turned in at the entrance of the Mansions.

"I will show you."

I made a desperate attempt to emulate Poirot's manner. "Well," I said, "it seems to me that the kind of person who laid the original booby-trap is not the kind of person to plan out a scientific murder."

"Exactly."

"And I doubt if a mind trained to scientific complexities would think of anything so childish as the accident plan—it would be altogether too haphazard."

"Very clearly reasoned."

Emboldened, I went on :

"Therefore, the only logical solution seems to be this—the two attempts were planned by two different people. We have here to deal with murder attempted by two entirely different people."

"You do not think that is too much of a coincidence?"

"You said yourself once that one coincidence is nearly always found in a murder-case."

"Yes, that is true. I have to admit it."

"Well, then."

"And who do you suggest for your villains?"

"Donaldson and Theresa Arundell. A doctor is clearly indicated for the final and successful murder. On the other hand, we know that Theresa Arundell is concerned in the first attempt. I think it's possible that they acted quite independently of each other."

"You are so fond of saying 'we know,' Hastings. I can assure you that no matter what *you* know, I do not know that Theresa was implicated."

"But Miss Lawson's story."

"Miss Lawson's story is Miss Lawson's story. Just that."

"But she says—"

"She says—she says.... Always you are so ready to take what people say for a proved and accepted fact. Now listen, *mon cher*, I told you at the time, did I not, that something struck me as wrong about Miss Lawson's story?"

"Yes, I remember your saying so. But you couldn't get hold of what it was."

"Well, I have done so now. A little moment and I

"That, very definitely, no."

"You know, Poirot, I don't quite understand all this."

"If you will pardon my saying so, Hastings, you do not understand at all!"

"There seem so many—well—side issues."

"Naturally there are side issues. To separate the main issue from the side issues is the first task of the orderly mind."

"Tell me, Poirot, have you realized all along that there were *eight* possible suspects and not seven?"

Poirot replied drily :

"I have taken that fact into consideration from the moment that Theresa Arundell mentioned that the last time she saw Dr. Donaldson was when he dined at Little-green House on April 14th."

"I can't quite see—" I broke off.

"What is it you cannot quite see?"

"Well, if Donaldson had planned to do away with Miss Arundell by scientific means—by inoculation, that is to say—I can't see why he resorted to such a clumsy device as a string across the stairs."

"*En vérité*, Hastings, there are moments when I lose patience with you! One method is a highly scientific one needing fully specialized knowledge. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And the other is a homely simple method—the kind that mother makes—as the advertisements say. Is that not right?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Then think, Hastings—*think*. Lie back in your chair, close the eyes, employ the little grey cells."

I obeyed. That is to say, I leant back in the chair and closed my eyes and endeavoured to carry out the third part of Poirot's instructions. The result, however, did not seem to clarify matters much.

I opened my eyes to find Poirot regarding me with the kindly attention a nurse might display towards a childish charge.

"*Eh bien?*"

of his own coat and slipped on mine, turning away a little as he did so.

"And now," said he. "Regard how the brooch—the brooch with *your* initials—becomes me?"

He whisked round. I stared at him—for the moment uncomprehendingly. Then I saw the point.

"What a blithering fool I am! Of course. It's H. A. in the brooch, not A. H. at all."

Poirot beamed on me, as he reassumed his own clothes and handed me mine.

"Exactly—and now you see what struck me as wrong with Miss Lawson's story. She stated that she had seen Theresa's initials clearly on the brooch she was wearing. But she saw Theresa in the *glass*. So, *if she saw the initials at all*, she must have seen them reversed."

"Well," I argued. "Perhaps she did, and realized that they were reversed."

"*Mon cher*, did that occur to you just now? Did you exclaim, 'Ha! Poirot, you've got it wrong—that's H. A. really—not A.H.'? No, you did not. And yet you are a good deal more intelligent, I should say, than Miss Lawson. Do not tell me that a muddle-headed woman like that woke up suddenly, and still half-asleep, realized that A. T. was really T. A. No, that is not at all consistent with the mentality of Miss Lawson."

"She was determined it should be Theresa," I said slowly.

"You are getting nearer, my friend. You remember, I hint to her that she could not really see the face of any one on the stairs, and immediately—what does she do?"

"Remembers Theresa's brooch and lugs that in—forgetting that the mere fact of having seen it in the glass gave her own story the lie."

The telephone bell rang sharply. Poirot crossed to it.

He only spoke a few non-committal words.

"Yes? Yes... certainly. Yes, quite convenient. The afternoon, I think. Yes, two o'clock will do admirably."

He replaced the receiver and turned to me with a smile.

will show you what I, imbecile that I am, ought to have seen at once."

He went over to the desk and opening a drawer took out a sheet of cardboard. He cut into this with a pair of scissors, motioning to me not to overlook what he was doing.

"Patience, Hastings, in a little moment we will proceed to our experiment."

I averted my eyes obligingly.

In a minute or two Poirot uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He put away the scissors, dropped the fragments of cardboard into the waste-paper basket and came across the room to me.

"Now, do not look. Continue to avert the eyes while I pin something to the lapel of your coat."

I humoured him. Poirot completed the proceeding to his satisfaction, then, propelling me gently to my feet he drew me across the room, and into the adjoining bedroom.

"Now, Hastings, regard yourself in the glass. You are wearing, are you not, a fashionable brooch with your initials on it—only, *bien entendu*, the brooch is made not of chromium nor stainless steel, nor gold, nor platinum—but of humble cardboard!"

I looked at myself and smiled. Poirot is uncommonly neat with his fingers. I was wearing a very fair representation of Theresa Arundell's brooch—a circle cut out of cardboard and enclosing my initials—A.H.

"*Eh bien*," said Poirot. "You are satisfied? You have there, have you not, a very smart brooch with your initials?"

"A most handsome affair," I agreed.

"It is true it does not gleam and reflect the light, but all the same you are prepared to admit that that brooch could be seen plainly from some distance away?"

"I've never doubted it."

"Quite so. Doubt is not your strong point. Simple faith is more characteristic of you. And now, Hastings, be so good as to remove your coat."

Wondering a little, I did so. Poirot divested himself

"Oh, did she? She didn't tell me that. I'll tell her, shall I?"

"If you would be so good."

Miss Lawson hurried out of the room. We could hear her voice.

"Bella—Bella—my dear, will you come and see M. Poirot?"

We did not hear Mrs. Tanios's reply, but a minute or two later she came into the room.

I was really shocked at her appearance. There were dark circles under her eyes and her cheeks were completely destitute of colour, but what struck me far more than this was her obvious air of terror. She started at the least provocation, and she seemed to be continually listening.

Poirot greeted her in his most soothing manner. He came forward, shook hands, arranged a chair for her and handed her a cushion. He treated the pale, frightened woman as though she had been a queen.

"And now, madame, let us have a little chat. You came to see me yesterday, I believe?"

She nodded.

"I regret very much that I was away from home."

"Yes—yes, I wish you had been there."

"You came because you wanted to tell me something?"

"Yes, I—I meant to—"

"*Eh bien*, I am here, at your service."

Mrs. Tanios did not respond. She sat quite still, twisting a ring round and round on her finger.

"Well, madame?"

Slowly, almost reluctantly, she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I daren't."

"You *daren't*, madame?"

"No. I—if he knew—he'd—oh, something would happen to me!"

"Come, come, madame—that is absurd."

"Oh, but it isn't absurd—it isn't absurd at all. You don't know him..."

"By *him*, you mean your husband, madame?"

"Yes, of course."

I would have advised her—but there, he isn't an Englishman... And she looks so peculiar, poor thing, so—well, so *scared*. What can he have been doing to her? I believe Turks are frightfully cruel sometimes."

"Dr. Tanios is a Greek."

"Yes, of course, that's the other way about—I mean, they're usually the ones who get massacred by the Turks—or am I thinking of Armenians? But all the same, I don't like to think of it. I don't think she *ought* to go back to him, do you, M. Poirot? Anyway, I mean, she says she won't.... She doesn't even want him to know where she is."

"As bad as that?"

"Yes, you see it's the *children*. She's so afraid he could take them back to Smyrna. Poor soul, she really is in a terrible way. You see, she's got no money—no money at all. She doesn't know where to go or what to do. She wants to try and earn her living, but, really, you know, M. Poirot, that's not so easy as it sounds. I know that. It's not as though she were *trained* for anything."

"When did she leave her husband?"

"Yesterday. She spent last night in a little hotel near Paddington. She came to me because she couldn't think of any one else to go to, poor thing."

"And are you going to help her? That is very good of you."

"Well, you see, M. Poirot, I really feel it's my *duty*. But, of course, it's all very difficult. This is a very small flat and there's no room—and what with one thing and another."

"You could send her to Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I could—but you see her husband might think of that. Just for the moment I've got her rooms at the Wellington Hotel in Queen's Road. She's staying there under the name of Mrs. Peters."

"I see," said Poirot.

He paused for a minute, then said :

"I would like to see Mrs. Tanios. You see, she called at my flat yesterday but I was out."

won't go back to him. I won't let him have the children! I'll go somewhere where he can't find me. Minnie Lawson will help me. She's been so kind—so wonderfully kind. Nobody could have been kinder." She stopped, then shot a quick look at Poirot and asked:

"What did he say about me? Did he say I had delusions?"

"He said, madame, that you had—changed towards him."

She nodded.

"And he said I had delusions. He *did* say that, didn't he?"

"Yes, madame, to be frank, he did."

"That's it, you see. That's what it will sound like. And I've no proof—no real proof."

Poirot leaned back in his chair. When he next spoke it was with an entire change of manner.

He spoke in a matter-of-fact, business-like voice with as little emotion as if he had been discussing some dry matter of business.

"Do you suspect your husband of doing away with Miss Emily Arundell?"

Her answer came quickly—a spontaneous flash.

"I don't suspect—I know."

"Then, madame, it is your duty to speak."

"Ah, but it isn't so easy—no, it isn't so easy."

"How did he kill her?"

"I don't know exactly—but he did kill her."

"But you don't know the method he employed?"

"No—it was something he did that last Sunday."

"The Sunday he went down to see her?"

"Yes."

"But you don't know what it was?"

"No."

"Then how, forgive me, madame, can you be so sure?"

"Because he—" She stopped and said slowly, "I *am* sure!"

"Pardon, madame, but there is something you are keeping back. Something you have not yet told me?"

"Yes."

Poirot was silent a minute or two, then he said :

"Your husband came to see me yesterday, madame."

A quick look of alarm sprang up in her face.

"Oh, no! You didn't tell him—but of course you didn't! You couldn't. You didn't know where I was. Did he—did he say I was *mad*?"

Poirot answered cautiously.

"He said that you were—highly nervous."

But she shook her head, undeceived.

"No, he said that I was mad—or that I was going mad! He wants to shut me up so that I shan't be able to tell any one ever."

"Tell any one—what?"

But she shook her head. Twisting her fingers nervously round and round, she muttered :

"I'm afraid..."

"But, madame, once you have *told* me—you are *safe*! The secret is out! The fact will protect you automatically."

But she did not reply. She went on twisting—twisting at her ring.

"You must see that yourself," said Poirot gently.

She gave a sort of gasp.

"How am I to know?... Oh, dear, it's terrible. He's so *plausible*! And he's a doctor! People will believe him and not me. I know they will. I should myself. Nobody will believe me. How could they?"

"You will not even give me the chance?"

She shot a troubled glance at him.

"How do I know? You may be on his side."

"I am on no one's side, madame. I am—always—on the side of the truth."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Tanios hopelessly. "Oh, I don't know."

She went on, her words gathering volume, tumbling over each other.

"It's been so awful—for years now. I've seen things happening again and again. And I couldn't say anything or do anything. There have been the children. It's been like a long nightmare. And now this.... But I

"Don't say I've been here. Don't say you've seen me."

"No, no, of course I won't."

Mrs. Tanios slipped through the door. Poirot and I followed hastily. We found ourselves in a small dining-room.

Poirot crossed to the door into the hall, opened it a crack and listened. Then he beckoned.

"All is clear. Miss Lawson has taken him into the other room."

We crept through the hall and out by the front door. Poirot drew it to as noiselessly as possible after him.

Mrs. Tanios began to run down the steps, stumbling and clutching at the banisters. Poirot steadied her with a hand under her arm.

"*Du calme—du calme.* All is well."

We reached the entrance-hall.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Tanios piteously. She looked as though she might be going to faint.

"Certainly I will come," said Poirot reassuringly.

We crossed the road, turned a corner, and found ourselves in the Queen's Road. The Wellington was a small, inconspicuous hotel of the boarding-house variety.

When we were inside, Mrs. Tanios sank down on a plush sofa. Her hand was on her beating heart.

Poirot patted her reassuringly on the shoulder.

"It was the narrow squeak—yes. Now, madame, you are to listen to me very carefully."

"I can't tell you anything more, M. Poirot. It wouldn't be right. You—you know what I think—what I believe. You—you must be satisfied with that."

"I asked you to listen, madame. Supposing—this is a supposition only—that *I already know the facts of the case*. Supposing that what you could tell me *I have already guessed*—that would make a difference, would it not?"....

She looked at him doubtfully. Her eyes were painful in their intensity.

"Oh, believe me, madame, I am not trying to trap you into saying what you do not wish to. But it *would* make a difference—yes?"

"Come, then."

Bella Tanios got up suddenly.

"No. No. I can't do that. The children. Their father. I can't. I simply can't...."

"But, madame—"

"I can't, I tell you."

Her voice rose almost to a scream. The door opened and Miss Lawson came in, her head cocked on one side with a sort of pleasurable excitement.

"May I come in? Have you had your little talk? Bella, my dear, don't you think you ought to have a cup of tea, or some soup, or perhaps a little brandy even?"

Mrs. Tanios shook her head.

"I'm quite all right." She gave a weak smile. "I must be getting back to the children. I have left them to unpack."

"Dear little things," said Miss Lawson. "I'm so fond of children."

Mrs. Tanios turned to her suddenly.

"I don't know what I should do without you," she said. "You—you've been wonderfully kind."

"There, there, my dear, don't cry. Everything's going to be all right. You shall come round and see my lawyer—such a nice man, so sympathetic, and he'll advise you the best way to get a divorce. Divorce is so simple nowadays, isn't it, everybody says so. Oh, dear, there's the bell. I wonder who that is."

She left the room hurriedly. There was a murmur of voices in the hall. Miss Lawson reappeared. She tiptoed in and shut the door carefully behind her. She spoke in an excited whisper, mouthing the words exaggeratedly.

"Oh, dear, Bella, it's your husband. I'm sure I don't know—"

Mrs. Tanios gave one bound towards a door at the other end of the room. Miss Lawson nodded her head violently.

"That's right, dear, go in there, and then you can slip out when I've brought him in here."

Mrs. Tanios whispered :

He did not even glance up at the Wellington. He passed it, his head bowed in thought, then he turned into the Underground station.

About ten minutes later we saw Mrs. Tanios and the children get into the taxi with their luggage and drive away.

"*Bien*," said Poirot, rising with the bill in his hand. "We have done our part. Now it is on the knees of the gods."

CHAPTER XXVII

Visit of Dr. Donaldson

Donaldson arrived punctually at two o'clock. He was as calm and precise as ever.

The personality of Donaldson had begun to intrigue me. I had started by regarding him as a rather nondescript young man. I had wondered what a vivid, compelling creature like Theresa could see in him. But I now began to realize that Donaldson was anything but negligible. Behind that pedantic manner there was ~~something~~ ^{something}.

After our preliminary greetings were over, Donaldson said :

"The reason for my visit is this. I am ~~at a loss to~~ understand exactly what your position is in ~~the matter~~. M. Poirot."

Poirot replied guardedly :

"You know my profession, I think?"

"Certainly. I may say that I have ~~been~~ ^{been} to make inquiries about you."

"You are a careful man, Doctor."

Donaldson said drily :

"I like to be sure of my facts."

"You have the scientific mind?"

"I may say that all reports ~~on you are the same~~ ^{on you are the same}. You are obviously a very clever ~~man in your profession~~ ^{man in your profession}. You have also the reputation of being a ~~superior~~ ^{superior} one."

"I—I suppose it would."

"Good. Then let me say this. I, *Hercule Poirot*, know the truth. I am not going to ask you to accept my word for it. Take this." He thrust upon her the bulky envelope I had seen him seal up that morning. "The facts are there. After you have read them, if they satisfy you, ring me up. My number is on the note paper."

Almost reluctantly she accepted the envelope.

Poirot went on briskly :

"And now, one more point, you must leave this hotel at once."

"But why?"

"You will go to the Coniston Hotel near Euston. Tell no one where you are going."

"But surely—here—Minnie Lawson won't tell my husband where I am."

"You think not?"

"Oh, no—she's entirely on my side."

"Yes, but your husband, madame, is a very clever man. He will not find it difficult to turn a middle-aged lady inside out. It is essential—*essential*, you understand, that your husband should not know where you are."

She nodded dumbly.

Poirot held out a sheet of paper.

"Here is the address. Pack up and drive there with the children as soon as possible. You understand?"

She nodded.

"I understand."

"It is the children you must think of, madame, not yourself. You love your children."

He had touched the right note.

A little colour crept into her cheeks, her head went back. She looked, not a frightened drudge, but an arrogant, almost handsome woman.

"It is arranged, then," said Poirot.

He shook hands and he and I departed. But not far from the shelter of a convenient café, we sipped coffee and watched the entrance of the hotel. In about five minutes we saw Dr. Tanios walking down the street

you and that her wish for money is mainly in order that your ambitions should be gratified?"

"Of course I realize it. I've already told you I'm not a fool. But I have no intention of allowing Theresa to embroil herself in any questionable situation on my account. In many ways Theresa is a child still. I am quite capable of furthering my career by my own efforts. I do not say that a substantial legacy would not have been acceptable. It would have been most acceptable. But it would merely have provided a short cut."

"You have, in fact, full confidence in your own abilities?"

"It probably sounds conceited, but I have," said Donaldson composedly.

"Let us proceed, then. I admit that I gained Miss Theresa's confidence by a trick. I let her think that I would be—shall we say, reasonably dishonest—for money. She believed that without the least difficulty."

"Theresa believes that any one would do anything for money," said the young doctor in the same tone one uses when stating a self-evident truth.

"True. That seems to be her attitude in business also."

"Charles probably *would* do anything for money."

"You have no illusions, I see, about your future in-law."

"No. I find him quite an interesting study. There is, I think, some deep-seated neurosis in the man's shop. To return to what we are discussing, I have asked myself why you should act in the way you have done, and I have found only one answer. It is that you suspect either Theresa or Charles of having a hand in Miss Arundell's death. No, please don't contradict me! Your mention of estimation was, I think, a mere device to see what reaction you would get. Have you, in actual fact, taken any steps towards getting a Home Office order for estimation?"

"I will be quite frank with you. As yet, I have not," Donaldson nodded.

"So I thought. I suppose you have decided to wait."

"You are too flattering," murmured Poirot.

"That is why I am at a loss to explain your connection with this affair."

"And yet it is so simple!"

"Hardly that," said Donaldson. "You first present yourself as a writer of biographies."

"A pardonable deception, do you not think? One cannot go everywhere announcing the fact that one is a detective—though that, too, has its uses sometimes."

"So I should imagine." Again Donaldson's tone was dry. "Your next proceeding," he went on, "was to call on Miss Theresa Arundell and represent to her that her aunt's will might conceivably be set aside."

Poirot merely bowed his head in assent.

"That, of course, was ridiculous" Donaldson's voice was sharp. "You knew perfectly well that that will was valid in law and that nothing could be done about it."

"You think that is the case?"

"I am not a fool, M. Poirot—"

"No, Dr. Donaldson, you are certainly not a fool."

"I know something—not very much, but enough—of the law. That will can certainly not be upset. Why did you pretend it could? Clearly for reasons of your own—reasons which Miss Theresa Arundell did not for a moment grasp."

"You seem very certain of her reactions."

A very faint smile passed across the young man's face. He said unexpectedly :

"I know a good deal more about Theresa than she suspects. I have no doubt that she and Charles think they have enlisted your aid in some questionable business. Charles is almost completely amoral. Theresa has a bad heredity and her upbringing has been unfortunate."

"It is thus you speak of your fiancée—as though she was a guinea-pig?"

Donaldson peered at him through his pince-nez.

"I see no occasion to blink the truth. I love Theresa Arundell and I love her for what she is and not for any imagined qualities."

"Do you realize that Theresa Arundell is devoted to

"On the contrary," said Poirot, "I always find that it succeeds to-day with monotonous regularity."

Donaldson smiled. He rose.

"I fear I have wasted your time, M. Poirot."

"Not at all. It is always as well to understand each other." With a slight bow, Dr. Donaldson left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Another Victim

"That is a clever man," said Poirot thoughtfully.

"It's rather difficult to know what he is driving at."

"Yes. He is a little inhuman. But extremely perceptive."

"That telephone call was from Mrs. Tanios."

"So I gathered."

I repeated the message. Poirot nodded approval.

"Good. All marches well. Twenty-four hours, Hastings, and I think we shall know exactly where we stand."

"I'm still a little fogged. Who exactly do we suspect?"

"I really could not say who *you* suspect, Hastings! Everybody in turn, I should imagine!"

"Sometimes I think you *like* to get me into that state!"

"No, no. I would not amuse myself in such a way."

"I wouldn't put it past you."

Poirot shook his head, but somewhat absently. I studied him.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"My friend, I am always nervous towards the end of a case. If anything should go wrong—"

"Is anything likely to go wrong?"

"I do not think so." He paused, frowning. "I have, I think, provided against every contingency."

"Then, supposing that we forget crime and go to a show?"

"*Ma foi*, Hastings, that is a good idea."

We passed a very pleasant evening, though I made the

possibility that Miss Arundell's death may turn out to be from natural causes?"

"I have considered the fact that it may appear to be so—yes."

"But your own mind is made up?"

"Very definitely. If you have a case of—say—tuberculosis that looks like tuberculosis, behaves like tuberculosis, and in which the blood gives a positive reaction—*eh bien*, you consider it *is* tuberculosis, do you not?"

"You look at it that way? I see. Then what exactly are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for a final piece of evidence."

The telephone bell rang. At a gesture from Poirot I got up and answered it. I recognized the voice.

"Captain Hastings? This is Mrs. Tanios speaking. Will you tell M. Poirot that he is perfectly right. If he will come here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, I will give him what he wants."

"At ten o'clock to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'll tell him."

Poirot's eyes asked a question. I nodded.

He turned to Donaldson. His manner had changed. It was brisk—assured.

"Let me make myself clear," he said. "I have diagnosed this case of mine as a case of murder. It looked like murder, it gave all the characteristic reactions of murder—in fact, it *was* murder! Of that, there is not the least doubt."

"Where then does the doubt—for I perceive there is a doubt—lie?"

"The doubt lay in *the identity of the murderer*—but that is a doubt no longer!"

"Really? You know?"

"Let us say that I shall have definite proof in my hands to-morrow."

Dr. Donaldson's eyebrows rose in a slightly ironical fashion.

"Ah," he said. "To-morrow! Sometimes, M. Poirot, to-morrow is a long way off."

"Oh, dear—it is terrible. Died in her sleep. An overdose of some sleeping stuff! And those *poor* little children! It all seems so dreadfully *sad*! I've done nothing but cry since I heard."

"How did you hear? Tell me all about it."

Out of the tail of my eye I noticed that Poirot had stopped opening his letters. He was listening to my side of the conversation. I did not like to cede my place to him. If I did it seemed highly probable that Miss Lawson would start with lamentations all over again.

"They rang me up. From the hotel. The Coniston it's called. It seems they found my name and address in her bag. Oh, dear, M. Poirot—Captain Hastings, I mean—*isn't it terrible?* Those poor little children left motherless."

"Look here," I said. "Are you sure it's an accident? They didn't think it could be suicide?"

"Oh, what a *dreadful* idea, Captain Hastings! Oh, dear, I don't know, I'm sure. Do you think it could be? That would be *dreadful*! Of course she *did* seem very depressed. But she needn't have been. I mean there wouldn't have been any difficulty about *money*. I was going to *share* with her—indeed I was! Dear Miss Arundell would have wished it. I'm sure of that! It seems so awful to think of her taking her own life—but perhaps she didn't.... The hotel people seemed to think it was an accident."

"What did she take?"

"One of those sleeping things. Veronal, I think. No, chloral. Yes, that was it. Chloral. Oh, dear, Captain Hastings, do you think—"

Unceremoniously I banged down the receiver. I turned to Poirot.

"Mrs. Tanios—"

He raised a hand.

"Yes, yes, I know what you are going to say. She is dead, is she not?"

"Yes. Overdose of sleeping-draught. Chloral."

Poirot got up.

"Come, Hastings, we must go there *at once*."

slight mistake of taking Poirot to a crook play. There is one piece of advice I offer to all my readers. Never take a soldier to a military play, a sailor to a naval play, a Scotsman to a Scottish play, a detective to a thriller—and an actor to any play whatsoever! The shower of destructive criticism in each case is somewhat devastating. Poirot never ceased to complain of faulty psychology, and the hero detective's lack of order and method nearly drove him demented. We parted that night with Poirot still explaining how the whole business might have been laid bare in the first half of the first act.

"But in that case, Poirot, there would have been no play," I pointed out.

Poirot was forced to admit that perhaps that was so.

It was a few minutes past nine when I entered the sitting-room the next morning. Poirot was at the breakfast-table—as usual neatly sitting open his letters.

The telephone rang and I answered it.

A heavy-breathing female voice spoke :

"Is that M. Poirot? Oh, it's you, Captain Hastings."

There was a sort of gasp and a sob.

"Is that Miss Lawson?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, such a terrible thing has happened!"

I grasped the receiver tightly.

"What is it?"

"She left the Wellington, you know—Bella, I mean. I went there late in the afternoon yesterday and they said she'd left. Without a word to me, either! *Most* extraordinary! It makes me feel that perhaps, after all, Dr. Tanios was *right*. He spoke so *nicely* about her and seemed so *distressed*, and now it really looks as though he were right after all."

"But what's happened, Miss Lawson? Is it just that Mrs. Tanios left the hotel without telling you?"

"Oh, no, it's not *that*! Oh, dear me, no. If that were all it would be *quite* all right. Though I do think it was *odd*, you know. Dr. Tanios did say that he was afraid she wasn't quite—not *quite*—if you know what I mean. Persecution mania, he called it."

"Yes." (Damn the woman!) "But what's *happened*?"

name and address had been found and she had been communicated with by telephone.

Poirot asked if anything had been found in the way of letters or papers. The letter, for instance, brought by the man who had called for the children.

No papers of any kind had been found, the man said, but there was a pile of charred paper on the hearth.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As far as any one could say, Mrs. Peters had had no visitors and no one had come to her room—with the solitary exception of the man who had called for the two children.

I questioned the porter myself as to his appearance, but the man was very vague. A man of medium height—he thought fair-haired—rather military build—of somewhat nondescript appearance. No, he was positive the man had no beard.

"It wasn't Tanios," I murmured to Poirot.

"My dear Hastings! Do you really believe that Mrs. Tanios, after all the trouble she was taking to get the children away from their father, would quite meekly hand them over to him without the least fuss or protest? Ah, that, no!"

"Then who was the man?"

"Clearly it was some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence or rather it was some one sent by a third person in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence."

"A man of medium height," I mused.

"You need hardly trouble yourself about his appearance, Hastings. I am quite sure that the man who actually called for the children was some quite unimportant personage. The real agent kept himself in the background!"

"And the note was from this third person?"

"Yes."

"Some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence?"

"Obviously."

"And the note is now burnt?"

"Yes, she was instructed to burn it."

"What about that résumé of the case that you gave her?"

"Is this what you feared—last night? When you said you were always nervous towards the end of a case?"

"I feared another death—yes."

Poirot's face was set and stern. We said very little as we drove towards Euston. Once or twice Poirot shook his head.

I said timidly :

"You don't think—? Could it be an accident?"

"No, Hastings—no. It was not an accident."

"How on earth did he find out where she had gone?"

Poirot only shook his head without replying.

The Coniston was an unsavoury-looking place quite near Euston station. Poirot, with his card, and a suddenly bullying manner, soon fought his way into the manager's office.

The facts were quite simple.

Mrs. Peters, as she had called herself, and her two children had arrived about half-past twelve. They had had lunch at one o'clock.

At four o'clock a man had arrived with a note for Mrs. Peters. The note had been sent up to her. A few minutes later she had come down with the two children and a suitcase. The children had then left with the visitor. Mrs. Peters had gone to the office and explained that she should only want the one room after all.

She had not appeared exceptionally distressed or upset, indeed she had seemed quite calm and collected. She had had dinner about seven-thirty and had gone to her room soon afterwards.

On calling her in the morning the chambermaid had found her dead.

A doctor had been sent for and had pronounced her to have been dead for some hours. An empty glass was found on the table by the bed. It seemed fairly obvious that she had taken a sleeping-draught, and, by mistake, taken an overdose. Chloral hydrate, the doctor said, was a somewhat uncertain drug. There were no indications of suicide. No letter had been left. Searching for means of notifying her relations, Miss Lawson's

naturally—that she died as the result of an accident—that she took her own life—or lastly that she met her death at the hands of some person known or unknown.

"No inquest was held at the time of her death, since it was assumed that she died from natural causes and a medical certificate to that effect was given by Dr. Grainger.

"In a case where suspicion arises after burial has taken place it is usual to exhumate the body of the person in question. There are reasons why I have not advocated that course. The chief of them is that my client would not have liked it."

It was Dr. Donaldson who interrupted. He said :
"Your client?"

Poirot turned to him. "My client is Miss Emily Arundell. I am acting for her. Her greatest desire was that there should be no scandal."

I will pass over the next ten minutes, since it would involve much needless repetition. Poirot told of the letter he had received, and producing it he read it aloud. He went on to explain the steps he had taken on coming to Market Basing, and of his discovery of the means taken to bring about the accident.

Then he paused, cleared his throat once more, and went on :

"I am now going to take you over the ground I travelled to get at the truth. I am going to show you what I believe to be a true reconstruction of the facts of the case.

"To begin with, it is necessary to picture exactly what passed in Miss Arundell's mind. That, I think, is fairly easy. She has a fall, her fall is supposed to be occasioned by a dog's ball, but *she herself knows better*. Lying there on her bed her active and shrewd mind goes over the circumstances of her fall and she comes to a very definite conclusion about it. Some one has deliberately tried to injure—perhaps to kill her.

"From that conclusion she passes to a consideration of who that person can be. There were *seven* people in the house—four guests, her companion and two servants. Of these seven people only one can be entirely

Poirot's face looked unusually grim.

"That, too, is burned. But that does not matter!"

"No?"

"No. For you see—it is all in the head of Hercule Poirot."

He took me by the arm.

"Come, Hastings, let us leave here. Our concern is not with the dead but with the living. It is with them I have to deal."

CHAPTER XXIX

Inquest at Littlegreen House

It was eleven o'clock the following morning.

Seven people were assembled at Littlegreen House. Hercule Poirot stood by the mantelpiece. Charles and Theresa Arundell were on the sofa, Charles on the arm of it with his hand on Theresa's shoulder. Dr. Tanios sat in a grandfather chair. His eyes were red-rimmed and he wore a black band round his arm.

On an upright chair by a round table sat the owner of the house, Miss Lawson. She, too, had red eyes. Her hair was even untidier than usual. Dr. Donaldson sat directly facing Poirot. His face was quite expressionless.

My interest quickened as I looked at each face in turn.

In the course of my association with Poirot I had assisted at many such a scene. A little company of people, all outwardly composed with well-bred masks for faces. And I had seen Poirot strip the mask from one face and show it for what it was—the face of a killer!

Yes, there was no doubt of it. *One of these people was a murderer!* But which? Even now I was not sure.

Poirot cleared his throat—a little pompously as was his habit—and began to speak.

"We are assembled here, ladies and gentlemen, to inquire into the death of Emily Arundell on the first of May last. There are four possibilities—that she died

"Charles was an *Arundell*. He bore the family name. Her reasons for suspecting him ~~seem quite~~ begin with, she had no illusions about Charles. They come near to disgracing the family name. But, is, she knew him to be not only a ~~criminal~~ criminal! He had already forged her name to a check. After forgery—a step further—murder.

"Also she had had a somewhat ~~unpleasant~~ conversation with him only two days before ~~he~~ he asked her for money and she ~~had~~ thereupon remarked—oh, ~~light~~ going the right way to get ~~him~~ she had responded that she ~~could~~ To this, we are told, he ~~replied~~ be too sure.' And two days later the ~~crime~~ takes place.

"It is hardly to be wondered at ~~that~~ brooding over the occurrence, ~~she~~ nitely to the conclusion ~~that~~ who had made an attempt ~~on~~

"The sequence of events is ~~as follows~~ conversation with Charles. ~~The~~ ten to me in great distress ~~of~~ lawyer. On the following ~~day~~ brings the will and she ~~signs~~

"Charles and Theresa ~~married~~ ing week-end and ~~Miss~~ sary steps to safeguard ~~the~~ the will. She not only ~~did~~ it to him! ~~Then~~ She is making it ~~quite~~ murder would bring ~~him~~

"She probably ~~thought~~ that information ~~to~~ Why? I fancy ~~that~~ guilty! He believed ~~that~~ had been made. ~~But~~ he had really ~~known~~ he had helped ~~him~~ Either the serious ~~crime~~

exonerated—since to that one person no advantage could accrue. She does not seriously suspect the two servants, both of whom have been with her for many years and whom she knows to be devoted to her. There remain, then, *four* persons, three of them members of her family, and one of them a connection by marriage. *Each of those four persons benefits, three directly, one indirectly, by her death.*

"She is in a difficult position, since she is a woman with a strong sense of family feeling. Essentially she is not one who wishes to wash the dirty linen in public, as the saying goes. On the other hand, she is not one to submit tamely to attempted murder!

"She takes her decision and writes to me. She also takes a further step. That further step was, I believe, actuated by two motives. One, I think, was a distant feeling of *spite* against her entire family! She suspected them all impartially, and she determined at all costs to score off them! The second and more reasoned motive was a wish to protect herself and a realization of how this could be accomplished. As you know, she wrote to her lawyer, Mr. Purvis, and directed him to draw up a will in favour of the one person in the house who, she felt convinced, could have had no hand in her accident.

"Now I may say that, from the terms of her letter to me and from her subsequent actions, I am quite sure that Miss Arundell passed from *indefinite* suspicion of four people to *definite* suspicion of *one* of those four. The whole tenor of her letter to me is an insistence that this business must be kept strictly private, since the honour of the family is involved.

"I think that, from a Victorian point of view, this means that a person of *her* own name was indicated—and preferably a *man*.

"If she had suspected Mrs. Tanios she would have been quite as anxious to secure her own safety, but not quite as concerned for the family honour. She might have felt much the same about Theresa Arundell, but not nearly as intensely as she would feel about Charles.

to suspect her own family, she would have stressed the fact of the dog, Bob, being out that night. But on the contrary Miss Lawson took the utmost pains to prevent Miss Arundell hearing of that. Therefore, I argued, Miss Lawson must be innocent."

Miss Lawson said sharply :

"I should hope so!"

"I next considered the problem of Miss Arundell's death. If one attempt to murder a person is made, a second attempt usually follows. It seemed to me significant that within a fortnight of the first attempt Miss Arundell should have died. I began to make inquiries.

"Dr. Grainger did not seem to think there was anything unusual about his patient's death. That was a little damping to my theory. But, inquiring into the happenings of the last evening before she was taken ill, I came across a rather significant fact. Miss Isabel Tripp mentioned a halo of light that had appeared round Miss Arundell's head. Her sister confirmed her statement. They might, of course, be inventing—in a romantic spirit—but I did not think that the incident was quite a likely one to occur to them unprompted. When questioning Miss Lawson she also gave me an interesting piece of information. She referred to a luminous ribbon issuing from Miss Arundell's mouth and forming a luminous haze round her head.

"Obviously, though described somewhat differently by two different observers, the actual fact was the same. What it amounted to, shorn of spiritualistic significance, was this : *On the night in question Miss Arundell's breath was phosphorescent!*"

Dr. Donaldson moved a little in his chair.

Poirot nodded to him.

"Yes, you begin to see. There are not very many phosphorescent substances. The first and most common one gave me exactly what I was looking for. I will read you a short extract from an article on phosphorus poisoning.

"The person's breath may be phosphorescent before he

for his reluctance. He said nothing, hoping that his aunt would relent and change her mind.

"As far as Miss Arundell's state of mind was concerned I felt that I had reconstructed events with a fair amount of correctness. I had next to make up my mind if her suspicions were, in actual fact, justified.

"Just as she had done, I realized that my suspicions were limited to a narrow circle—seven people to be exact. Charles and Theresa Arundell, Dr. Tanios and Mrs. Tanios, the two servants, and Miss Lawson. There was an eighth person who had to be taken into account—namely, Dr. Donaldson, who dined there that night, but I did not learn of his presence until later.

"These seven persons that I was considering fell easily into two categories. Six of them stood to benefit in a greater or lesser degree by Miss Arundell's death. If any one of those six had committed the crime the reason was probably a plain matter of *gain*. The second category contained one person only—Miss Lawson. Miss Lawson did *not* stand to gain by Miss Arundell's death, but *as a result of the accident*, she did benefit considerably *later*!

"That meant that if Miss Lawson staged the so-called accident—"

"I never did anything of the kind!" Miss Lawson interrupted. "It's disgraceful! Standing up there and saying such things!"

"A little patience, mademoiselle. And be kind enough not to interrupt," said Poirot.

Miss Lawson tossed her head angrily.

"I insist on making my protest! Disgraceful, that's what it is! Disgraceful!"

Poirot went on, unheeding.

"I was saying that *if* Miss Lawson staged that accident she did so for an entirely *different* reason—that is, she engineered it so that Miss Arundell *would naturally suspect her own family and become alienated from them*. That *was* a possibility! I searched to see if there were any confirmation or otherwise and I unearthed one very definite fact. If Miss Lawson wanted Miss Arundell

have been dining in the house on the evening of the dog's ball incident.

"At this point I had very little to help me. I had to fall back upon the psychology of the crime and the personality of the murderer! Both crimes had exactly the same outline. They were both simple. They were cunning, and carried out with efficiency. They required a certain amount of knowledge but not a great deal. The facts about phosphorus poisoning are easily learned, and the stuff itself, as I say, is quite easily obtained, especially abroad.

"I considered first the two men. Both of them were doctors, and both were clever men. Either of them might have thought of phosphorus and its suitability in this particular case, but the incident of the dog's ball did not seem to fit a masculine mind. The incident of the ball seemed to me essentially a woman's idea.

"I considered first of all Theresa Arundell. She had certain potentialities. She was bold, ruthless, and not over-scrupulous. She had led a selfish and greedy life. She had always had everything she wanted and she had reached a point where she was desperate for money—both for herself and for the man she loved. Her manner, also, showed plainly that she knew her aunt had been murdered.

"There was an interesting little passage between her and her brother. I conceived the idea that *each suspected the other of the crime*. Charles endeavoured to make her say that *she knew of the existence of the new will*. Why? Clearly because if she knew of it she could not be suspected of the murder. She, on the other hand, clearly did not believe Charles's statement that Miss Arundell had shown it to him! She regarded it as a singularly clumsy attempt on his part to divert suspicion from himself.

"There was another significant point. Charles displayed a reluctance to use the word 'arsenic.' Later I found that he had questioned the old gardener at length upon the strength of some weed-killer. It was clear what had been in his mind."

Charles Arundell shifted his position a little.

feels in any way affected. That is what Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp saw in the dark—Miss Arundell's phosphorescent breath—'a luminous haze.' And here I will read you again. *The jaundice having thoroughly pronounced itself, the system may be considered as not only under the influence of the toxic action of phosphorus, but as suffering in addition from all the accidents incidental to the retention of the biliary secretion in the blood, nor is there from this point any special difference between phosphorus poisoning and certain affections of the liver—such for example as yellow atrophy.*

"You see the cleverness of that? Miss Arundell has suffered for years from liver trouble. The symptoms of phosphorus poisoning would only look like *another attack of the same complaint*. There will be nothing new, nothing startling about it.

"Oh! it was well planned! Foreign matches—vermin paste? It is not difficult to get hold of phosphorus, and a very small dose will kill. The medicinal dose is from 1/100 to 1/30 grain.

"*Voilà*. How clear—how marvellously clear the whole business becomes! Naturally, the doctor is deceived—especially as I find his sense of smell is affected—the garlic odour of the breath is a distinct symptom of phosphorus poisoning. He had no suspicions—why should he have? There were no suspicious circumstances and the one thing that might have given him a hint was the one thing he would never hear—or if he did hear it he would only class it as spiritualistic nonsense.

"I was now sure (from the evidence of Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp) that murder had been committed. The question still was by *whom*? I eliminated the servants—their mentality was obviously not adapted to such a crime. I eliminated Miss Lawson, since she would hardly have prattled on about luminous ectoplasm if she had been connected with the crime. I eliminated Charles Arundell, *since he knew, having seen the will, that he would gain nothing by his aunt's death.*

"There remained his sister Theresa, Dr. Tanios, Mrs. Tanios and Dr. Donaldson, whom I discovered to

ing that there was something she wanted to tell me. When her husband followed her as she knew he would, she pretended that she could not speak before him.

"I realized at once, not that she feared her husband, but that she disliked him. And at once, summing the matter up, I felt convinced that here was the exact character I had been looking for. Here was—not a self-indulgent woman—but a thwarted one. A plain girl, leading a dull existence, unable to attract the men she would like to attract, finally accepting a man she did not care for rather than be left an old maid. I could trace her growing dissatisfaction with life, her life in Smyrna exiled from all she cared for in life. Then the birth of her children and her passionate attachment to them.

"Her husband was devoted to her, but she came secretly to dislike him more and more. He had speculated with her money and lost it—another grudge against him.

"There was only one thing that illumined her drab life, the expectation of her Aunt Emily's death. Then she would have money, independence, the means to educate her children as she wished—and remember education meant a lot to her—she was a professor's daughter!

"She may have already planned the crime, or had the idea of it in her mind, before she came to England. She had a certain knowledge of chemistry, having assisted her father in the laboratory. She knew the nature of Miss Arundell's complaint and she was well aware that phosphorus would be an ideal substance for her purpose.

"Then, when she came to Littlegreen House, a simpler method presented itself to her. The dog's ball—a thread or string across the top of the stairs. A simple, ingenious woman's idea.

"She made her attempt—and failed. I do not think that she had any idea that Miss Arundell was aware of the true facts of the matter. Miss Arundell's suspicions were directed entirely against Charles. I doubt if her manner to Bella showed any alteration. And so, quietly and determinedly, this self-contained, unhappy, ambitious woman put her original plan into execution. She found an excellent vehicle for the poison, some patent capsules

"I thought of it," he said. "But—well, I suppose I hadn't got the nerve."

Poirot nodded at him.

"Precisely, *it is not in your psychology*. Your crimes will always be the crimes of weakness. To steal, to forge—yes, it is the easiest way—but to kill—*no!* To kill one needs the type of mind that can be obsessed by an idea."

He resumed his lecturing manner.

"Theresa Arundell, I decided, had quite sufficient strength of mind to carry such a design through, but there were other facts to take into consideration. She had never been thwarted, she had lived fully and selfishly—but that type of person is *not the type that kills*—except perhaps in sudden anger. And yet—I felt sure—it *was Theresa Arundell who had taken the weed-killer from the tin.*"

Theresa spoke suddenly :

"I'll tell you the truth. I thought of it. I actually took some weed-killer from a tin down at Littlegreen House. But I couldn't do it! I'm too fond of living—of being alive—I couldn't do that to any one—take life from them.... I may be bad and selfish but there are things I can't do! I couldn't kill a living, breathing, human creature!"

Poirot nodded. "No, that is true. And you are not as bad as you paint yourself, mademoiselle. You are only young—and reckless."

He went on :

"There remained Mrs. Tanios. As soon as I saw her I realized that she was afraid. She saw that I realized that and she very quickly made capital out of that momentary betrayal. She gave a very convincing portrait of a woman *who is afraid for her husband*. A little later she changed her tactics. It was very cleverly done—but the change did not deceive me. A woman can be afraid *for* her husband or she can be afraid *of* her husband—but she can hardly be *both*. Mrs. Tanios decided on the latter rôle—and she played her part cleverly—even to coming out after me into the hall of the hotel and pretend-

that Miss Arundell was in the habit of taking after meals. To open a capsule, place the phosphorus inside and close it again, was child's play. The capsule was replaced among the others. Sooner or later Miss Arundell would swallow it. Poison was not likely to be suspected. Even if by some unlikely chance it was, she herself would be nowhere near Market Basing at the time.

"Yet she took one precaution. She obtained a double supply of chloral hydrate at the chemist's, forging her husband's name to the prescription. I have no doubt of what that was for—to keep by her in case anything went wrong.

"As I say, I was convinced from the first moment I saw her that Mrs. Tanios was the person I was looking for, but I had absolutely no *proof* of the fact. I had to proceed carefully. If Mrs. Tanios had any idea I suspected her, I was afraid that she might proceed to a further crime. Furthermore, I believed that the idea of the crime had already occurred to her. Her one wish in life was to shake herself free of her husband.

"Her original murder had proved a bitter disappointment. The money, the wonderful all-intoxicating money had all gone to Miss Lawson! It was a blow, but she set to work most intelligently. She began to work on Miss Lawson's conscience which, I suspect, was already not too comfortable."

There was a sudden outburst of sobs. Miss Lawson took out her handkerchief and cried into it.

"It's been dreadful," she sobbed. "I've been wicked. Very wicked. You see, I was very curious about the will—why Miss Arundell had made a new one, I mean. And one day, when Miss Arundell was resting, I managed to unlock the drawer in the desk. And then I found she'd left it all to *me*! Of course, I never dreamed it was so *much*. Just a few thousands—that's all I thought it was. And why not? After all, her own relations didn't really *care* for her! But then, when she was so ill, she asked for the will. I could see—I felt sure—she was going to destroy it.... And that's when I was so wicked. I told her she'd sent it back to Mr. Purvis. Poor dear

Miss Lawson. She also definitely accused her husband of the murder.

"Unless I acted I felt convinced that he would be her next victim. I took steps to isolate them one from the other on the pretext that it was for her safety. She could not very well contradict that. Really, it was *his* safety I had in mind. And then—and then—"

He paused—a long pause. His face had gone rather white.

"But that was only a temporary measure. I had to make sure that the killer would kill no more. I had to assure the safety of the innocent.

"So I wrote out my construction of the case and gave it to Mrs. Tanios."

There was a long silence.

Dr. Tanios cried out :

"Oh, my God, so that's why she killed herself."

Poirot said gently :

"Was it not the best way? She thought so. There were, you see, the children to consider."

Dr. Tanios buried his face in his hands.

Poirot came forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It had to be. Believe me it was necessary. There would have been more deaths. First yours—then possibly, under certain circumstances, Miss Lawson's. And so it goes on."

He paused.

In a broken voice Tanios said :

"She wanted me—to take a sleeping-draught one night... There was something in her face—I threw it away. That was when I began to believe her mind was going...."

"Think of it that way. It is indeed partly true. But not in the legal meaning of the term. She knew the meaning of her action...."

Dr. Tanios said wistfully :

"She was much too good for me—always."

A strange epitaph on a self-confessed murderess!

Miss Lawson told me that she had seen Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Monday. I soon discovered that Miss Lawson could not have seen Theresa at all clearly—not nearly clearly enough to recognize her *features*. Yet she was quite positive in her identification. On being pressed she mentioned a brooch with Theresa's initials—T.A.

"On my request Miss Theresa Arundell showed me the brooch in question. At the same time she absolutely denied having been on the stairs at the time stated. At first I fancied some one else had borrowed her brooch, but when I looked at the brooch in the glass the truth leaped at me. Miss Lawson, waking up, had seen a dim figure with the initials T.A. flashing in the light. She had leapt to the conclusion that it was Theresa.

"But if in the glass she had seen the initials T.A.—then the real initials must have been A.T., since the glass naturally reversed the order.

"Of course! Mrs. Tanios's mother was Arabella Arundell. Bella is only a contraction. A.T. stood for Arabella Tanios. There was nothing odd in Mrs. Tanios possessing a similar type of brooch. It had been exclusive last Christmas, but by the spring they were all the rage, and I had already observed that Mrs. Tanios copied her cousin Theresa's hats and clothes as far as she was able with her limited means.

"In my own mind, at any rate, my case was proved.

"Now—what was I to do? Obtain a Home Office order for the exhumation of the body? That could doubtless be managed. I *might* prove that Miss Arundell had been poisoned with phosphorus, though there was a little doubt about that. The body had been buried two months, and I understand that there have been cases of phosphorus poisoning where no lesions have been found and where the post-mortem appearances are very indecisive. Even then, could I connect Mrs. Tanios with the purchase or possession of phosphorus? Very doubtful, since she had probably obtained it abroad.

"At this juncture Mrs. Tanios took a decisive action. She left her husband, throwing herself on the pity of

'Let's go to the Brevoort, but my treat.'

'I thought you lost all your money,' said Miss Day.

'I did, but I cashed a cheque on the way downtown. A man that works for my uncle cashed it for me. Shall we go?'

*

The nose of the Packard convertible went now up, now down. The car behaved like an army tank on a road that ordinarily was used only by trucks. Paul Farley, driving, was chewing on his lower lip, and the man beside him, looking quite pleased with himself and the world at large, was holding his chin up and dropping the ashes of his cigar on the floor of Farley's car.

'Let's stop,' said the man. 'Just take one more look. See how it looks from here.'

Farley stopped, none too pleased, and looked around. It did please him to look at the nearly finished house; it was his work. 'Looks pretty swell to me,' he said.

'I think so,' said Percy Kahan. He was just learning to say things like 'I think so' when he meant 'You're damn right'. People like Farley, you never knew when they were going to say something simple, like 'You're damn right', or something sophisticated, restrained, like 'I think so'. But it was better to err on the side of the restrained than the enthusiastic. Besides, he was the buyer; Farley was still working for him as architect, and it didn't do to let Farley think he was doing too well.

'A swell job. I know when I've done a swell job, and I've done one for you, Mr Kahan. About the game room, my original estimate won't cover that now. I could have done it earlier in the game, but I don't suppose you're going to quibble over at the most twelve hundred dollars now. You understand what I meant about the game room itself. That could be done for a great deal less, and still can, but if you want it to be in keeping with the rest of the house my best advice is, don't try to save on the little things. I was one of the first architects to go in for game rooms, that is to recognize them as an important feature of the modern home. Up to that time a game room - well, I suppose you've seen enough of them to know what most of them were like. Extra space in the cellar, so they put in a portable bar, ping-pong table, a few posters from the French Line -'

'No, I live here, but I couldn't go home looking like this. My family - they won't even allow me to smoke. All right, Eddie.'

'Looks better on you than it does on me,' said Norma.

'I wouldn't say that,' said Eddie.

'I wouldn't either,' said Gloria, 'but Eddie never says anything to make me get conceited. We've known each other such a long time.'

'Eddie, I thought you went on the wagon after Friday,' said Norma.

'I did.'

'Oh, that. That's mine,' said Gloria. 'I bought it for Eddie because I wanted to get in his good graces. You see I thought I was going to have to spend the day here and I was going to bribe Eddie to go uptown to one of the Broadway shops, I think there are some open on Sunday night, they always seem to be open. But then he suggested you, and I think you're perfectly darling to do this. I'll hang this up in one of your closets, Eddie, and call for it tomorrow. I've been intending to put it in storage but I keep putting it off and putting it off -'

'I know,' said Miss Day.

'- and then last night I was glad I hadn't, because a cousin of mine that goes to Yale, he and a friend arrived in an open car and it was cold. No top. They were frozen, but they insisted on driving out to a house party near Princeton.'

'Oh. Weren't your family worried? You didn't go home then?'

'The car broke down on the way back at some ungodly hour this morning. Bob, my cousin's friend, took us to a party when we got back to town and that's where I got in the crap game.'

'But what about your cousin? I should think -'

'Passed out cold, and he's not much help anyway. Not that he'd let them make me give up my dress, but he can't drink. None of our family can. I had two drinks of that Scotch and I'm reeling. Suppose you noticed it.'

'Oh, no. But I can never tell with other people till they start doing perfectly terrible things,' said Miss Day.

'Well, I feel grand. I feel like giving a party. By the way, before I forget it, if you give me your address I'll have these things cleaned and send them to you.'

'All right,' said Miss Day, and gave her address.

can into gold. Gold notes when he can't get the actual bullion. Well, that isn't so good. The general spirit of alarm and unrest, and next year being a Presidential year, but I've got my overhead, I've got my expenses, Presidential year or no Presidential year. So far I haven't had to lay off a single draughtsman and I don't want to have to do it, but great heavens, if people are going to take their money out of industry and let it lie gathering dust in safe deposit vaults, or in secret vaults in their own homes, the general effect is going to be pretty bad.

'Now with a house like this, people will see this house and they can't help being enchanted with it, and it's been my experience that a house like yours, Mr Kahan, with a page or two of photographs in *Town and Country* and *Country Life* and *Spur*, people who might be tempted to hoard their money -'

'You mean pictures of this house in *Town and Country*?'

'Naturally,' said Farley. 'You don't suppose I'd let this house go without - unless you'd rather not. Of course if you'd -'

'Oh, no. Not me. I'm in favour of that. Don't tell Mrs Kahan, though. It'd make a nice surprise for her.'

'Certainly. Women like that. And women are mighty important in these things. As I was saying, I'm counting on people seeing this house, and your friends and neighbours coming in - that's one reason why I'd like to see you have a good game room, when you entertain informally, people will see what a really fine house you have, and they'll want to know who did the house. It's good business for me to do a good job for you any time, Mr Kahan, but especially now.'

'*Town and Country*, eh? Do I send in the pictures or do you?'

'Oh, they'll send for them. They call up and find out my plans in advance, you know, and I tell them what houses I'm doing, or at least my secretary does - it's all routine. I suppose I've had more houses chosen for photographing in those magazines than any architect within ten years of my age. Shall we go back to the club? I imagine the ladies are wondering what's happened.'

'Okay, but now listen, Mr Farley, I don't want you paying for dinner again. Remember last time we were out here I said next

'Oh, I want those. Can you get them?'

'I think so. I never like to ask them for anything, because I have my private opinion of the whole French Line crowd, but that's a mere detail. Anyway, what I want to point out is that I was one of the first to see what an important adjunct to the home a game room can be. I'd like to show you some things I've done out in the Manhasset section. The Whitney neighbourhood, you know.'

'Oh, did you do the Jock Whitney estate too?'

'No, I didn't do that, but in that section I've - two years ago I had eleven thousand dollars to spend on one game room out that way.'

'But that was two years ago,' said Mr Kahan. 'Whose house was that?'

'Well-hell, I, uh, it isn't exactly ethical to give names and figures, Mr Kahan. You understand that. Anyway, you see my point about not trying to chisel a few dollars in such an important feature of the home. For instance, you'll want a large open fireplace, you said. Well, that's going to cost you money now. You see, not to be too technical about it, we've gone ahead without making any provision for fireplaces on that side of the house, the side where it would have to be if you wanted it in the game room. And, you have the right idea about it. There *should be* an open fireplace there.'

'You see, Mr Kahan, I want this house to be right. I'll be frank with you. A lot of us architects just can't take it, and a lot of fellows I know are pretty darn pessimistic about the future. Naturally we've been hit pretty hard, some of us, but I personally can't complain. So far this year I've done well over a half a million dollars' worth of business - '

'Net?'

'Oh, no. Not net. I'm a residence architect, Mr Kahan. But that stacks up pretty well beside what I've been doing the last three years. I had my best year oddly enough last year, Mr Kahan.'

'No kidding.'

'Oh, yes. I had a lot of work in Palm Beach. And so far this year I've had a very good, a very satisfactory year. But next year, I'm a little afraid of next year. Not because people haven't got the money, but because they're afraid to spend it. There's an awful lot of hoarding going on. I know a man who is turning everything he

Chapter 3

WELL, I can see why you didn't want me to see the ending first. I never would have stayed in the theatre if I'd seen that ending. And you wanted to see that again? God, I hope if you ever write anything it won't be like that.'

'I hope if I ever write anything it affects somebody the way this affected you,' said Jimmy.

'I suppose you think that's good. I mean good writing,' said Isabel. 'Where shall we go?'

'Are you hungry?'

'No, but I'd like a drink. One cocktail. Is that understood?'

'Always. Always one cocktail. That's always understood. I know a place I'd like to take you to, but I'm a little afraid to.'

'Why, is it tough?'

'It isn't really tough. I mean it doesn't look tough, and the people - well, you don't think you're in the Racquet Club, but unless you know where you are, I mean unless you're tipped off about what the place has, what its distinction is, it's just another speakeasy, and right now if I told you what its distinguishing characteristic is, you wouldn't want to go there.'

'Well, then let's not go there,' she said. 'What is peculiar about the place?'

'It's where the Chicago mob hangs out in New York.'

'Oh, well, then by all means let's go there. That is, if it's safe.'

'Of course it's safe. Either it's safe or it isn't. They tell me the local boys approve of this place, that is, they sanction it, allow it to exist and do business, because they figure there has to be one place as a sort of hangout for members of the Chicago mobs. There's only one real danger.'

'What's that?'

'Well, if the Chicago mob starts shooting among themselves. So far that hasn't happened, and I don't imagine it will. You'll see why.'

They walked down Broadway a few blocks and then turned and walked east. When they came to a highly polished brass sign which advertised a wigmaker, Jimmy steered Isabel into the narrow doorway, back a few steps, and rang for the elevator. It grinded its way

big dinner, and I might as well warn you in advance, Mrs Farley knows wines. I don't know a damn thing about them, but she does.'

They drove to the club, where the ladies were waiting; Mrs Farley fingering her wedding ring and engagement ring and guard in a way she had when she was nervous, Mrs Kahan painlessly pinching the lobe of her left ear, a thing she did when she was nervous.

'Well,' said the four, in unison.

Farley asked the others if they would like cocktails, and they all said they would, and he took Kahan to the locker-room to wash his hands and to supervise the mixing of the drinks. As they were coming in the locker-room a man was on his way out, in such a hurry that he bumped Kahan. 'Oh, I beg your pardon, sir,' said the man.

'Oh, that's all right, Mr Liggett,' said Kahan.

'Oh - oh, how are you,' said Liggett. 'Glad to see you.'

'You don't know who I am,' said Kahan, 'but we were classmates at New Haven.'

'Oh, of course.'

'Kahan is my name.'

'Yes, I remember. Hello, Farley.'

'Hello, Liggett, you join us in a cocktail?'

'No, thanks. I've got a whole family waiting in the car. Well, nice to have seen you, Kann. 'Bye, Farley.' He shook hands and hurried away.

'He didn't know me, but I knew him right away.'

'I didn't know you went to Yale,' said Farley.

'I know. I never talk about it,' said Kahan. 'Then once in a while I see somebody like Liggett, one of the big Skull and Bones fellows he was, and one day I met old Doctor Hadley on the street and I introduced myself to him. I can't help it. I think what a waste of time, four years at that place, me a little Heeb from Hartford, but last November I had to be in Hollywood when the Yale-Harvard game was played, and God damn it if I don't have a special wire with the play by play. The radio wasn't good enough for me. I had to have the play by play. Yes, I'm a Yale man.'

down, and a sick-eyed little Negro with a uniform cap opened the door. They got in and Jimmy said: 'Sixth Avenue Club.'

'Yessa,' said the Negro. The elevator rose two stories and stopped. They got out and were standing then right in front of a steel door, painted red, and with a tiny door cut out in the middle. Jimmy rang the bell and a face appeared in the tiny door.

'Yes, sir,' said the face. 'What was the name again?'

'You're new or you'd know me,' said Jimmy.

'Yes, sir, and what was the name again?'

'Malloy, for Christ's sake.'

'And what was the address, Mr Malloy?'

'Oh, nuts. Tell Luke Mr Malloy is here.'

There was a sound of chains and locks and the door was opened. The waiter stood behind the door. 'Have to be careful who we let in, sir. You know how it is.'

It was a room with a high ceiling, a fairly long bar on one side, and in the corner on the other side was a food bar, filled with really good free lunch and with obviously expensive kitchen equipment behind the bar. Jimmy steered Isabel to the bar.

'Hello, Luke,' he said.

'Howdy do, sir,' said Luke, a huge man with a misleading pleasant face, not unlike Babe Ruth's.

'Have a whiskey sour, darling. Luke mixes the best whiskey sours you've ever had.'

'I think I want a Planter's punch - all right, a whiskey sour.'

'Yours, sir?'

'Scotch and soda, please.'

Isabel looked around. The usual old rascal looking into a schooner of beer and the usual phony club licence hung above the bar mirror. Many bottles, including a bottle of Rock and Rye, another speciality of Luke's, stood on the back bar. Except for the number and variety of the bottles, and the cleanliness of the bar, it was just like any number (up to 20,000) of speakeasies near to and far from Times Square. Then Isabel saw one little article that disturbed her: an 'illuminated' calendar, with a pocket for letters or bills or something, with a picture of a voluptuous dame with nothing on above the waist. The calendar still had not only all the months intact, but also a top sheet with '1931' on it. And across the front of the pocket was the invitation 'When in Chicago Visit

suppose I could walk through Grand Central at the same time President Hoover was arriving on a train, and the Secret Service boys wouldn't collar me on sight as a public enemy. That's because I dress the way I do, and I dress the way I do because I happen to prefer these clothes to Broadway clothes or Babbitt clothes. Also, I have nice manners because my mother was a lady and manners were important to her, also to my father in a curious way, but when I was learning manners I was at an age when my mother had greater influence on me than my father, so she gets whatever credit is due me for my manners. Sober.

'Well, I am often taken for a Yale man, by Yale men. That pleases me a little, because I like Yale best of all the colleges. There's another explanation for it, unfortunately. There was a football player at Yale in 1922 and around that time who looks like me and has a name something like mine. That's not important.'

'No, except that it takes away from your point about producing public enemies, your family. You can't look like a gangster *and* a typical Yale man.'

'That's true. I have an answer for that. Let me see. Oh, yes. The people who think I am a Yale man aren't very observing about people. I'm not making that up as a smart answer. It's true. In fact, I just thought of something funny.'

'What?'

'Most men who think I'm a Yale man went to Princeton themselves.'

'Oh, come on,' she said. 'You just said -'

'All right. I know. Well, that's not important and I'm only confusing the issue. What I want to say, what I started out to explain was why I said "you people, you members of the upper crust", and so on, implying that I am not a member of it. Well, I'm *not* a member of it, and now I never will be. If there was any chance of it it disappeared - let me see - two years ago.'

'Why two years ago? You can't say that. What happened?'

'I starved. Two years ago I went for two days one time without a thing to eat or drink except water, and part of the time without a cigarette. I was living within two blocks of this place, and I didn't have a job, didn't have any prospect of one, I couldn't write to my family, because I'd written a bad cheque a while before that and

not two kinds of Irishmen. There's only one kind. I've studied enough pictures and known enough Irishmen personally to find that out.'

'What do you mean, studied enough pictures?'

'I mean this, I've looked at dozens of pictures of the best Irish families at the Dublin Horse Show and places like that, and I've put my finger over their clothes and pretended I was looking at a Knights of Columbus picnic - and by God you can't tell the difference.'

'Well, why should you? They're all Irish.'

'Ah, that's exactly my point. Or at least we're getting to it. So, a while ago you say I look like James Cagney -'

'Not look like him. Remind me of him.'

'Well, there's a faint resemblance, I happen to know, because I have a brother who looks enough like Cagney to be his brother. Well, Cagney is a Mick, without any pretence of being anything else, and he is America's ideal gangster. America, being a non-Irish, anti-Catholic country, has its own idea of what a real gangster looks like, and along comes a young Mick who looks like my brother, and he fills the bill. He is the typical gangster.'

'Well, I don't see what you prove by that. I think -'

'I didn't prove anything yet. Here's the big point. You know about the Society of the Cincinnati? You've heard about them?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, if I'm not mistaken I could be a member of that Society. Anyway I could be a Son of the Revolution. Which is nice to know sometimes, but for the present purpose I only mention it to show that I'm pretty God-damn American, and therefore my brothers and sisters are, and yet we're not American. We're Micks, we're non-assimilable, we Micks. We've been here, at least some of my family, since before the Revolution - and we produce the perfect gangster type! At least it's you American Americans' idea of a perfect gangster type, and I suppose you're right. Yes, I guess you are. The first real gangsters in this country were Irish. The Mollic Maguires. Anyway, do you see what I mean by all this non-assimilable stuff?'

'Yes, I suppose I do.'

'All right. Let me go on just a few sticks more. I show a logical fact, I prove a sociological fact in one respect at

interested them. However, a cruising taxi appeared and Isabel and Jimmy got in.

'Home?' said Jimmy.

'Yes, please,' said Isabel.

Jimmy began to sing: '... How's your uncle? I haven't any uncle. I hope he's fine and dandy too.'

Silence.

'Four years ago this time do you know what was going on?'

'No.'

'The Snyder-Gray trial.'

Silence.

'Remember it?'

'Certainly.'

'What was Mr Snyder's first name?'

'Whose?'

'Mister Sny-der's.'

'It wasn't Mister Snyder. It was Ruth Snyder. Ruth Snyder, and Judd Gray.'

'There was a Mr Snyder, though. Ah, yes, there was a Mr Snyder. It was he, dear Isabel, it was he who was assassinated. What was his first name?'

'Oh, how should I know? What do I care what his first name was?'

'Why are you sore at me?'

'Because you humiliated me in public, calling the waiter and asking him to take me to the door, barking at me and saying perfectly vile, vile things.'

'Humiliated you in public,' he said. 'Humiliated you in public. And you don't remember Mr Snyder's first name.'

'If you're going to talk, talk sense. Not that I care whether you talk or not.'

'I'm talking a lot of sense. You're sore at me because I humiliated you in public. What the hell does that amount to? Humiliated in public. What about the man that Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray knocked off? I'd say he was humiliated in public, plenty. Every newspaper in the country carried his name for days, column after column of humiliation, all kinds of humiliation. And yet you don't even remember his name. Humiliation my eye.'

'It isn't the same thing.'

I was in very bad at home. I couldn't borrow from anybody, because I owed everybody money. I'd borrowed from practically everybody I knew even slightly. A dollar here, ten dollars there. I stayed in for two days because I couldn't face the people on the street. Then the nigger woman that cleaned up and made the beds in this place where I lived, she knew what was happening, and the third morning she came to work she brought me a chicken sandwich. I'll never forget it. It was on rye bread, and home-cooked chicken, not flat and white, but chunky and more tan than white. It was wrapped in newspaper. She came in and said, "Good morning, Mr Malloy. I brought you a chicken sandwich if you like it." That's all. She didn't say why she brought it, and then she went out and bought me a container of coffee and pinched a couple of cigarettes - Camels, and I smoke Luckies - from one of the other rooms. She was swell. She knew.'

'I should think she was swell enough for you to call her a coloured woman instead of a nigger.'

'Oh, balls!'

'I'm leaving.'

'Go ahead.'

'Just a Mick.'

'See? The first thing you can think of to insult me with. Go on, beat it. Waiter, will you open the door for this lady, please?'

'Aren't you coming with me?'

'Oh, I guess so. How much, Luke?'

'That'll be one-twenty,' said Luke, showing, by showing nothing on his face, that he strongly disapproved the whole thing.

Exits like the one Isabel wanted to make are somewhat less difficult to make since the repeal of Prohibition. In those days you had to wait for the waiter to peer through the small door, see that everything was all right, open at least two locks, and hold the door open for you. The most successful flouncing out in indignation is done through swinging doors.

He had to ring for the elevator and wait for it in silence, they had to ride down together in silence, and find a taxi with a driver in it. There were plenty of taxis, but the hackmen were having their usual argument among themselves over the Tacna-Arica award and a fare was apparently the last thing in the world that

explain a thing like that; why. But it happened and in the long run it's going to be a good thing, because when those stocks go up there again, this time they're going to be worth it.

On that basis he brought his income down from the \$75,000 he earned in 1929 to about \$27,000 for 1930. His salary was \$25,000 and this was not cut, for his Tammany connexions were as good in 1930 as they were in 1929, and he sold. In 1929 his income from Liggett & Company, aside from salary, was \$40,000 including commissions. In addition he had an income of about \$10,000 from his mother's estate, which was tied up in non-Liggett investments in Pittsburgh. In 1930 his profits from Liggett & Company amounted to \$15,000 which went to his brokers, as did the \$5,000 he got from his mother's estate. But he and another man did make \$2,000 apiece from an unexpected source, and they thought seriously of doing it every year.

Liggett convinced himself he had to go abroad in the Spring of 1930, and a man he had known in College but less well in the after years, came to him with a scheme which took Liggett's breath away. They talked it over in the smoke room, and as part of the scheme they bought out the low field in the ship's pool. The next day shortly after high noon the ship stopped, and was stopped for a good hour. As a result of the delay Liggett and his friend, holding the low field, won the biggest pool of the voyage, and Liggett's end was around \$2,000. It was not clear profit, however; \$500 of it went to the steward whom they had bribed to fall overboard at noon that day. In Liggett's favour it must be said that he refused at first to go into the scheme, and would not have done so had he not been assured that a financier whom he always had looked up to as a model of righteousness and decorum had once given the bridge an out-and-out-bribe, with subtle threats to back it up, to win a pool that didn't even pay his passage. Also, Liggett had to be assured that his fellow-conspirator would choose a steward who could swim. . . .

He hurried from the train to a phone booth and called his home number. No answer. That didn't mean anything, though. It only meant that this Gloria was not answering his telephone. He took the subway to Times Square, but instead of taking the shuttle to Grand Central he went up to the street out of that horrible subway air (it was much better when there were a lot of people in it: you

used by someone else – that was a gift from the gods to Liggett. He would apply for his tickets, sign the pledge that went with the tickets – and then when some properly placed Tanimany man came to him for a pair for the Harvard game, Liggett would explain about the pledge but he would turn over the tickets. Liggett did not think it entirely necessary to justify this violation of his word of honour, but he had two justifications ready: the first was that he did not approve of the pledge; the second, that he had got boils on his arse year after year for Yale, four years of rowing without missing a race, and he felt that made him a better judge of what to do with one of the few benefits he derived from being an old 'Y' man than some clerk in the Athletic Association office. On at least one occasion those tickets made the difference between getting an equipment contract and not getting it. And so, looking at it one way, he was a valuable man to the firm. The plant no longer belonged to the Liggett family, but he was a director, as a teaser for any lingering good will that his father and grandfather might have left. He voted his own and his sister's stock, but he voted the way he was told by the attorney for his father's estate, who was also a director.

It took the whole year 1930 to teach him that he just did not know his way around that stock market. Business was a simple thing, he told himself: it was buying and selling, supply and demand. His grandfather had come over here, a little English mechanic from Birmingham, and supplied a demand. His father had continued the supply and demand part, but had also gone in more extensively for the buying and selling. In 1930 Liggett reasoned with himself: the buying and selling is not up to me the way it was up to my father, and neither is the supplying of the demand up to me the way it was up to Grandfather. I am in the position of participating in the activities of both my grandfather and my father, and yet since I am not right there at the plant, I have something they didn't have. I have a detached point of view. Liggett & Company are supplying – and selling. Now wherever I go I see buildings going up, I see excavations being made. A few common stocks – all right, *all* common stocks – have taken a thumping, but that's because some of them were undoubtedly priced at more than they were worth. All right. Something happens and the whole market goes smaeko. Why? Well, who can

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Liggett convinced himself he had to go abroad in the Spring of 1930, and a man he had known in College but less well in the after years, came to him with a scheme which took Liggett's breath away. They talked it over in the smoke room, and as part of the scheme they bought out the low field in the ship's pool. The next day shortly after high noon the ship stopped, and was stopped for a good hour. As a result of the delay Liggett and his friend, holding the low field, won the biggest pool of the voyage, and Liggett's end was around \$2,000. It was not clear profit, however; \$500 of it went to the steward whom they had bribed to fall overboard at noon that day. In Liggett's favour it must be said that he refused at first to go into the scheme, and would not have done so had he not been assured that a financier whom he always had looked up to as a model of righteousness and decorum had once given the bridge an out-and-out-bribe, with subtle threats to back it up, to win a pool that didn't even pay his passage. Also, Liggett had to be assured that his fellow-conspirator would choose a steward who could swim. . . .

He hurried from the train to a phone booth and called his home number. No answer. That didn't mean anything, though. It only meant that this Gloria was not answering his telephone. He took the subway to Times Square, but instead of taking the shuttle to Grand Central he went up to the street out of that horrible subway air (it was much better when there were a lot of people in it; you

used by someone else – that was a gift from the gods to Liggett. He would apply for his tickets, sign the pledge that went with the tickets – and then when some properly placed Tanimany man came to him for a pair for the Harvard game, Liggett would explain about the pledge but he would turn over the tickets. Liggett did not think it entirely necessary to justify this violation of his word of honour, but he had two justifications ready: the first was that he did not approve of the pledge; the second, that he had got boils on his arse year after year for Yale, four years of rowing without missing a race, and he felt that made him a better judge of what to do with one of the few benefits he derived from being an old 'Y' man than some clerk in the Athletic Association office. On at least one occasion those tickets made the difference between getting an equipment contract and not getting it. And so, looking at it one way, he was a valuable man to the firm. The plant no longer belonged to the Liggett family, but he was a director, as a teaser for any lingering good will that his father and grandfather might have left. He voted his own and his sister's stock, but he voted the way he was told by the attorney for his father's estate, who was also a director.

It took the whole year 1930 to teach him that he just did not know his way around that stock market. Business was a simple thing, he told himself: it was buying and selling, supply and demand. His grandfather had come over here, a little English mechanic from Birmingham, and supplied a demand. His father had continued the supply and demand part, but had also gone in more extensively for the buying and selling. In 1930 Liggett reasoned with himself: the buying and selling is not up to me the way it was up to my father, and neither is the supplying of the demand up to me the way it was up to Grandfather. I am in the position of participating in the activities of both my grandfather and my father, and yet since I am not right there at the plant, I have something they didn't have. I have a detached point of view. Liggett & Company are supplying – and selling. Now wherever I go I see buildings going up, I see excavations being made. A few common stocks – all right, *all* common stocks – have taken a thumping, but that's because some of them were undoubtedly priced at more than they were worth. All right. Something happens and the whole market goes smacko. Why? Well, who can

took her in his arms as roughly as possible. He squeezed her body against his until she felt really small to him. She kept her drink in her hand and held it high while she leaned her head back as far as she could, her face away from his face. She stopped speaking, but she did not look angry. Tolerant. She looked tolerant, as though she were dealing with a prep school kid, as though she were suffering but knew this would be over in a little while and she would be there, with her drink in her hand and her dignity unaffected. That finally was what made him release her, but not for the reason she supposed. She thought he was going to give up, but that dignity was too much for him. He had to break that some way, so he let her go, took his arms from around her, and then snatched the top of the front of her dress and ripped it right down the front. It tore right down the middle.

Instantly there were changes. He had frightened her and she was pitiful and sweet. He didn't even notice that her dignity was at least genuine enough to cause her to hold on to the drink and walk two steps with it to a table. For a minute, two minutes, he was ready to love her with all the tenderness and kindness that seemed to be all of a sudden at his command, somewhere inside him. He followed her to the table and waited for her to put down the drink. He was aware now, the day after, but hadn't been last night, that she looked a little posed, in a trite pose, with her chin almost on her shoulder, her eyes looking away from him, her right arm making a protective V over her chest, her left hand cupped under her right elbow. He put his hands on her biceps and pressed a little. 'Kiss me,' he said.

'As a reward,' she said.

She turned her face toward him, sufficient indication that she would kiss him. He put his hands in back of her again and kissed her tenderly on the mouth, and then she slowly lowered her arms from in front of her and put them around him, and she walked up to him without moving her feet.

Thinking of it now he knew that it went beyond love. It was so completely what it was, so new in its thoroughness and proficiency that for the first time in his life he understood how these guys, these bright young subalterns, betray King and Country for a woman. He even understood how they could do it while knowing that the woman was a spy, that she was not faithful to them: for he did not

could look at the horrible people and that took your mind off the air) and rode the rest of the way home in a taxi.

He looked for signs of something in the face of the elevator operator, but nothing there, only that six-months-from-Christmas 'Good afternoon, sir'. He hurriedly inspected the apartment, even opening the kitchen door that opened upon the service hall.

'Well, she's not here,' he said aloud, and went back to take a better look at the bathroom. She certainly had made a nice little mess of that. Then he noticed that his toothbrush, which always stood in a tumbler, was lying on the lavatory. A tube of toothpaste had been squeezed in the middle and the cap had not been replaced. He held the toothbrush to his nose. Yes, by God, the hitch had brushed her teeth with his brush. He broke it in half and threw it in a trash basket.

In the bedroom he saw her evening gown and evening coat. He picked up the gown and looked at it. He turned it inside out and looked at it at approximately the point where her legs would begin on her body, expecting to find he knew not what, and finding nothing. It was a good job of tearing he had done and he was embarrassed about that. From the way she had behaved when once he got her into bed there was no reason to suspect her of being a teaser, but why had she been so teaser-like when he brought her home? They were both drunk, and he had to admit that she was a little less drunk than he, could drink more was what he was trying not to admit. She had come home with a man she had met only that night, come to his apartment after necking with him in a taxi and allowing him to feel her breasts. She had gone to his bathroom and when she came out and saw him standing there waiting for her with a drink in his hand she accepted the drink but was all for going back to the living-room. 'No, it's much more comfortable here,' he remembered saying, and remembered thinking that if he hadn't said anything it would have been better, for as soon as he spoke she said she thought it was more comfortable in the living-room, and he said all right, it was more comfortable in the living-room but that they were going to stay here. 'Oh, but you're wrong,' she said, and looked at him in the face and then slowly down his body, the frankest look anyone ever had given him, the only time he ever was completely sure that he was looking at someone's thoughts. He got up and put his drink on a table and

were a little drunk and having an argument when Liggett entered the bar, and the man took the woman's arm and steered her away from the bar to a table in the same room but away from Liggett. Obviously the woman was the man's mistress and he was helplessly in love with her.

'Ever since I've known you,' she said, very loud, 'you've asked me nothing but questions.'

Liggett got some nickels and went to the phone booth to call an engineer friend. The engineer did not answer. He tried two other engineer friends because he wanted to go on a tour of the speakasies where he would be likely to find Gloria, and he wanted to be with a man but not one of his real friends. They would be at home with their wives or out to parties with their wives, and he wanted to go out with a man whose wife did not know Emily. He tried these engineers, but no soap. No answer. He tried a third, a man he did not specially like, and the man was very cordial and tried to insist on Liggett's coming right up and joining a cocktail party where there was a swell bunch. Liggett got out of that. In another minute he was sure he could have had the company of the man in the cutaway, judging by the conversation between the man and his woman. The conversation had taken a renunciatory turn and the woman was any minute now going home and sending back everything he had ever given her, and he knew what he could do with it. Not wishing to be left alone with the man, Liggett drank the rest of his highball, paid his bill, and went to another speakeasy, next door.

The first person he saw was Gloria, all dressed up in a very smart little suit. She gave him a blank look. She was with a young man and a pretty young girl. He went over and shook hands and Gloria introduced him to the other people and finally asked him to sit down for a second, that they were just leaving.

'Oh, I thought we were going to have dinner here,' said Miss Day. 'I'm really getting hungry.'

There was a silence for the benefit of Miss Day, who was being tacitly informed by everyone at the table that she should have known better than to say that. 'Are you waiting for someone?' said Liggett.

'Not exactly,' said Gloria.

'I really feel like an awful stupid and rude and all when you were

care how many men Gloria had stayed with since she left this apartment; he wanted her now. He hadn't remembered this all afternoon, so long as he was with Emily and the girls, but right now if he could have Gloria here he would not care if Emily and the kids came in and watched. 'God damn it!' he shouted. She couldn't possibly know the things he knew. He was forty-two, and she wasn't less than twenty years younger than he, and — aah, what difference did it make. Wherever she was he'd find her, and he would get her an apartment tonight. This, then, was what happened to men that made people speak of the dangerous age and all that. Well, dangerous age, make a fool of yourself, whatever else was coming to him he would take if he could have that girl. But he would have to have her over and over again, a year of having her. And to make sure of that he would get her an apartment. Tonight. Tomorrow she could have the charge accounts.

He telephoned her at home, not expecting to find her there, but there was always the chance. A timid male voice answered; probably her father, Liggett thought. She was not home and was not expected back till later this evening. That did not discourage Liggett. He thought he knew enough about her to know where to find her. He made a bundle of her evening clothes and took it with him and went downstairs and took a taxi to the Grand Central. He checked the bundle there and was going to throw away the check, but thought she might like to have the dress for some reason, maybe sentimental, maybe to patch something. Women often saved old dresses for reasons like that, and he had no right to throw away the check. Besides, the coat was all right. He hadn't thought of that at first, because all he thought of was the torn dress. It was annoying the way he kept thinking of that. He liked to think of tearing the dress and stripping her, all in one thought, with the memory of how she had looked at just that moment, her body and her terror. But the fact of tearing a girl's dress was embarrassing and he did not like to be left alone with that thought. He went to a speakeasy in East Fifty-third Street, the one in which two men inside of two years shot themselves in the men's toilet. They were taking the last few chairs off the tables, getting ready to open up, but the bar was open and a man in a cutaway and a woman friend were having drinks. The man was a gentleman, in his late forties. The woman was in her early thirties, tall and voluptuous. They

It was on the tip of her tongue to say yes, the mink coat. She
id, 'Why, I haven't the faintest idea.'

He reached in his pocket and brought out the check for the
undie he had left at Grand Central. 'You,' he said.

'What's this?' she said, taking the check.

'The rye is for Miss Wandrous. Scotch for me,' said Liggett to
the waiter who had sneaked up with the drinks. When he went
away Liggett went on: 'That's for your dress and coat. You got
the money I left. Was it enough?'

'Yes. What do you mean you want me?'

'Well, I should think that would be plain enough. I want you.
want to - if I get you an apartment will you live in it?'

'Oh,' she said. 'Well, I live at home with my family.'

'You can tell them you have a job and you want to be uptown.'

'But I didn't say I wanted to live uptown. What makes you want
me for your mistress? I didn't know you had a mistress, I know
that gag, so don't you say it.'

'I wasn't going to. I want you, that's why.'

'Do you want me to tell you?'

'Well -'

'First you want me because I'm good in bed and your wife isn't.
Or if she is - don't bridle. I guess she is, judging by the way you
took that. But you're tired of her and you want me because I'm
young enough to be your daughter.'

'Just about,' he said. 'I'd have had to have you when I was very
young.'

'Not so very. I saw pictures of your daughters in your living
room, and they're not much younger than I am. But I don't want
you to feel too old so we'll pass over that. You want me, and you
think because you paid the rent for an apartment that I'd be yours
and no one else's. Isn't that true?'

'No. As a matter of fact it isn't. I was thinking not an hour ago,
before I knew where you were, Gloria, I discovered something
and that is, I didn't care who you were with or in what bed, I
still wanted you.'

'Oh. Desperate. You *are* getting a little, uh, you're getting
worried about how near fifty is, aren't you?'

'Maybe. I don't think so. Men don't get menopause. I may
have as many years left as you. I've taken good care of myself.'

so kind to invite us for dinner,' said Miss Day, 'but really, Miss Wandrous, I'd of rather stayed at the Brevoort and ate there because I was hungry then. I - ' Then she shut up.

'I think we ought to go,' said Mr Brunner. 'Gloria, we'll take a rain check on that dinner.' He had not been drinking, and he had a kind of surly-sober manner that men sometimes get who are temporarily on the wagon but usually good drinkers. Liggett quickly stood up before they changed their minds. Miss Day apparently had postponed her appetite because she got up too.

When they had gone Liggett said: 'I've been trying to get you. I phoned all over and I was going to look everywhere in New York till I did find you. What are you drinking?'

'Rye and plain water.'

'Rye and plain water, and Scotch and soda for me. Do you want to eat here?'

'Am I having dinner with you?'

'Well, aren't you?'

'I don't know. What do you want that you've been calling me all over, as you put it, although I don't know where you'd be apt to call me except home.'

'And the Manger.'

'That's not funny. I was drunk last night. That won't happen again.'

'Yes. It *must* happen again. It's got to. Listen, I don't know how to begin.'

'Then don't, if it's a proposition. Because if it's a proposition I'm not interested.' She knew she was lying, for she was interested in almost any proposition; interested in hearing it, at least. But so far she could not tell which way he was headed. He had said nothing to indicate that he had discovered her theft of the coat but his avoiding that topic might be tactical and only that. She resolved not to say anything about it until he did, but to wait for the first crack that would indicate that he wanted the coat back. She was not at this point prepared to take a stand about the coat, Later, maybe, but not now.

He looked down at his hands, which were making 'Here's the Church, here's the steeple, open the door, and there's all the people.'

'Do you know what I want?' he said.

I do like you. Do you know why? You're just a plain ordinary everyday man. You think you're something pretty hot and sophisticated because you're unfaithful to your wife. Well, I could tell you things about this rotten God damn dirty town that - ugh. I know a man that was almost elected - Well, I guess I better shut up. I know much too much for my age. But I like you, Liggett, because you want me the way I want to be wanted, and not with fancy variations. Let's get out of here, it's too damn effete.'

'Where do you want to go?' Liggett said.

'Down to Forticth Street to my practically favourite place.'

They went to the place in Fortieth Street, up a winding staircase. They were admitted after being peered at, it turned out, by a man with a superb case of acne rosacea. 'I was afraid you wouldn't remember me,' said Gloria.

'What? Fancy me not remembering you, Miss?' said the man, who was the bartender.

'And what will be your pleasure to partake of this Lord's Day?' said the bartender. 'Little Irish, perhaps?'

'Yes, fine.'

'And you, sir?'

'Scotch and soda.'

'Fine. Fine,' said the bartender.

It was the longest bar in New York in those days, and the room was bare except for the absolute essentials. One half of it held tables and chairs and a mechanical piano, but there was one half in front of the bar which was bare concrete floor. Liggett and Gloria were getting used to themselves and smiling at each other in the mirror when a voice rose.

'Laddy doo, Laddy doo, Lie die dec. Tom!'

'Please control your exuberation, Eddie,' said Tom, the bartender, and smiled broadly at Gloria and Liggett.

'Gimme a couple nickels, Tom, Laddy doo, Laddy doo.'

They looked at the man called Eddie, who was sitting at the other end of the bar, rubbing his fat hands together and showing his teeth. He had on a uniform cap and a grey vest and blue pants, and then they noticed he had a wire in his twister, handcuffs, and other patrolman's equipment. He lay on a chair. 'I beg your pardon. I'm not a bartender. I'm a cop. Serve the lady and gentleman fine.'

'I hope.'

'I hope you have, too.'

'Don't you worry about me. The first thing I do tomorrow is go to my friend on Park Avenue.'

'Who's your friend on Park Avenue?'

'My friend on Park Avenue? That's my doctor. I'll be able to tell you this week whether there's anything the matter with you, and me.'

'Do you always go to him?'

'Always, without fail. Listen, you, I don't want to sit here and talk about venereal disease. You didn't let me finish what I was saying. You think I'd be faithful to you because you gave me an apartment. My handsome friend, I would be faithful to you only as long as I wanted to be, which might be a year or might be till tomorrow afternoon. No. No apartment for me. If you want to take an apartment where we can go when I want to go with you, or where you can take anyone you please, that's entirely up to you. But after looking around at your apartment and making a guess as to how you live? Not interested. You haven't enough money to own me. Last year, last fall, that is, I got a pretty good idea how much I was worth. Could you pay the upkeep on a hundred and eighty-foot yacht? Diesel yacht?'

'No, frankly.'

'Well, this man could and does, and I'll bet he doesn't use it half a dozen times a year. He goes to the boat races in it and takes a big party of young people, and has it down in Florida with him when he goes, and before it was his I saw it at Monte Carlo.'

'I guess I know who that is.'

'Yes, I guess you do. Well, he wanted me, too.'

'Why didn't you take him up if you want money?'

'Do you know why? Because do you know those pictures of pygmies in the Sunday papers? Little men with legs like match sticks and fat bellies with big umbilicals and wrinkled skin? That's what he looks like. Also I can't say I enjoy his idea of fun. Ugh.'

'What?'

'I honestly wouldn't know how to tell you. I'd be embarrassed. Maybe you've heard, if you know who it is.'

'You mean he's peculiar?'

'Huh. Peculiar. Listen, darling, do you know why I like you?'

served while the cop looked on. He took it off the piano and laid it on the back of a chair, and then he went to the piano.

'Get away from that God damn piano!' yelled Tom. 'Forgive your pardon, Miss. Eddie, you lug you got to get that thing it's out of order.'

'You go to hell,' said Eddie. 'Beg your mother's pardon Lady, I have some rights here.' The nickel he had dropped had set the motor humming, and in a minute the place was filled with the strains of 'Dinah, is there anyone finer?'

'Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the wrong record,' said the man in real pain. 'I wanted "Mother Machree".'

*

A special delivery letter which arrived at the home of Gloria Wandrous the next morning:

Dear Gloria - I see that you have not changed one whit your deplorable habit of breaking appointments, or did you not realize that we had an appointment today? I came, at great inconvenience, to New York today, hoping to see you on the matter which we are both anxious to settle. I brought with me the amount you specified, which is a large sum to be carrying about an one's person, especially in times like these.

Please try to be at home tomorrow (Monday) between 12 noon and 1 p.m., when I shall attempt to reach you by long distance telephone. If not, I shall try again at the same hour on Tuesday.

If you realized what inconvenience it costs me to come to New York you would be more considerate.

Hastily,
J. E. R.

Gloria read this letter late Monday afternoon, when she went home after spending the night with Liggett. 'Poor dear,' she said, upon reading the letter. 'If I realized what inconvenience, meecyah!'

'I was doing that very thing,' said Tom, 'and when I get done I'll be giving you no nickels and stop askin'.'

'Laddy doo. Gimme a beer, my Far Doon friend,' said Eddie. 'After serving the lady and gentleman, of course.'

'When I get good and ready I'll give yiz a beer. It's almost time for you to ring in anyway. What about we taxpayers of this great city? When we go to exercise our franchise at the polls we'll change all this.'

'Civil Service. Did you never hear of the Civil Service, my laddy-buck? The members of the Finest are Civil Service and what the likes of you repeaters do at the polls affects us not one single iota. A beer!'

'Get outa here. Go on out and ring in. It's twenty-five to, time to box in.'

'The clock is fast.'

'God can strike me dead if it is. I fixed it meself comin' in this evening. Go on or you'll be wrote up again.'

'I'll go, and I'll be back with a hatful of nickels,' said Eddie. He pulled his equipment belt around and put on his tunic and straightened his cap and as he was leaving he said, 'Will I bring you a paper?'

'Go on, don't be trying to soft-soap me now,' said Tom.

A party of four young men came in and began to play very seriously a game with matches, for drinks. A man in an undershirt and black trousers, wearing a cap made out of neatly folded newspaper, came in and waved his hand to the match-game players, but sat alone. A man with his hat on the back of his head came in and spoke to the players and to the man with the newspaper cap. He sat alone and began making faces at himself in the mirror and went into a long story which Tom showed by nods that he was listening to. During the story the man never once took his eyes off his reflection in the mirror. Tom was attentive with the man who looked at himself, chatted about baseball with the man with the newspaper cap, kidded with the match-game players, and was courtly with Liggett and Gloria. The cop came back bearing several newspapers and a large paper bag, from which he took several containers. Out of these he poured stewed clams into dishes which Tom got out of the bottom of the free lunch bar. The cop said: 'Let the lady have hers first,' and then everyone else was

envied by a good many classmates. Even the wealthy ones envied him. He had something; back east they knew about Eddie. Hadn't his drawings been in *Judge* and *College Humour* time after time? Eddie's father, a lucky sot who had made the fourth of a series of minor fortunes in miniature golf courses, had become bored with the golf courses and in the nick of time had converted them, wherever the zoning laws would permit, into drive-in car-service eateries, which were doing fabulous business in Eddie's last year in college. Brunner the elder was never so happy as when accompanying a party of 'sportsmen' and newspaper writers to a big fight back east. Jack Dempsey was a great friend of his. He himself was an alumnus of the University of Kansas, but he gave huge football parties at Stanford and then at the St Francis after the games. These did not embarrass Eddie, as Eddie had not joined his father's fraternity, and when the old gent came down to Stanford he called at his own fraternity and otherwise busied himself so that Eddie could follow his own plans. Eddie had for his father the distant tolerance that sometimes compensates for a lack of any other feeling, or, better yet, is a substitute for the contempt. Eddie sometimes was in danger of feeling.

Eddie accepted his father's generosity with polite thanks, knowing that Brunner père spent every week in tips at least as much as the \$50 allowance he gave his son in senior year. Eddie spent his allowance on collectors' items among old Gennett records, and on his girl. Almost regularly every six months Eddie fell in love with a new girl, and he would be in love with her until some amatory crisis, such as a mid-year examination, would come. He would take his mind off the girl, and he would resume his existence to find that he had been thoughtless about his dates, and he would have to get a new girl. With a good second-hand Packard phaeton and a seeming inability to get drunk, his instinctive good manners and what the girls called his dry sense of humour, he could have just about his choice of the second-flight Stanford girls.

The idea was that the allowance was to enable him to come to New York and stay until he got a job. He had some Bristol board and the rest of it was in a scaman's chest, and enough hand luggage to fill a trunk. Eddie and two cronies drove to New York.

Chapter 4

EDDIE BRUNNER was one of the plain Californians. He was one of those young men whose height and frame make them look awkward unless they are wearing practical yachting clothes, or a \$150 tailcoat. He did not gain much presence from his height, which was six feet two. When he talked standing up he made a gesture, always the same gesture; he put out his hands in the position of holding an imaginary basketball, about to shoot an imaginary foul. He could not talk with animation unless he stood up, but he did not often talk with animation. Like all Californians he made a substantive clause of every statement he made: 'It's going to rain today, is what I think . . . Herbert Hoover isn't going to be our next President, is my guess . . . I only have two bucks, is all.'

In his two years in New York he had had four good months, or make it five. At Stanford he was what is known as well liked, which tells a different story from popular. Popular men and women in college make a business of being popular. Well-liked people do things without getting disliked for them. Eddie Brunner drew funny pictures. He had a bigger vogue away from Stanford than at it, because the collegiate magazines republished his drawings. He had taken the work of several earlier collegiate comic artists - notably Taylor, of Dartmouth - and fashioned a distinctive comic type. He drew little men with googly eyes whose heads and bodies looked as though they had been pressed squat. He had a rebuff signature: a capital B and a line drawing of a runner. It was a tiny signature. It had to be because the men Eddie drew were so small. In college he drew no women if he could help it; with his technique women would have to have fat legs and squat little bodies. Occasionally he did a female head as illustration for *He*. She gags, most of which he wrote himself.

The *Stanford Chaparral*, as a result of Eddie's drawings, had a high unofficial rating among college humorous monthlies during the three years Eddie contributed to it. He did nothing in freshman year; he was just barely staying in college, what with his honest laziness, his fondness for certain phonograph records, and a girl.

When he got out of College, with the class of '29, he was secretly

'No,' said Malloy. 'Piano.'

'Oh, piano. That means I mix drinks,' said the boy at the piano.

'Yes, I guess it does after you hear Sylvia,' said Malloy.

'As good as that?' said the trombone player.

'Go ahead, Sylvia,' said Malloy.

'I ought to have another drink first.'

'Give her another drink,' said Eddie. 'Here, have mine.'

She gulped his drink and took off her rings and handed them to Malloy. 'Don't forget where they came from,' she said. 'And a cigarette.' Malloy lit a cigarette for her and she took two long drags.

'She better be good,' said one roommate to the other.

Then with her two tiny hands she hit three chords, all in the bass, one, two, three. 'Jazz!' yelled the Californians, and got up and stood behind her.

She played for an hour. While she played one thing the Californians would be waiting for her to play when she got finished. At the end of the hour she wanted to stop and they would not let her. 'All right,' she said. 'I'll do my impressions. My first impression is Vincent Lopez playing "Nola".'

'All right, you can quit,' said Eddie.

'None too soon,' she said. 'Where is the little girls' room, quick.'

'What does she do? Who is she? What does she do for a living?' the Californians wanted to know.

'She's a comparison shopper at Macy's,' said Malloy.

'What is that?'

'A comparison shopper,' said Malloy. 'She goes around the other stores finding out if they're underselling Macy's, that's all.'

'But she ought to. How did you ever get to know her?' said the piano player.

'Listen, I don't like your tone, see? She's my girl, and I am a very tough guy.'

'Oh, I don't think you're so tough. Big, but not so tough, is my guess.'

'No, not so tough, but plenty tough enough for you,' said Malloy, and got up and swung at the piano player. The trombone player grabbed Malloy's arms. The piano player had caught the blow on his upraised forearm.

'Time for letting them fight,' said Eddie, but he was kind of

His father had arranged with his secretary about the allowance, and so it came regularly. With the cronies he took an apartment in a good building in Greenwich Village, and each of the friends furnished a bedroom and divided the cost of furnishing the common living-room. They bought a bar, a quantity of gin, installed a larger electric icebox, and began doing the town. One of Eddie's roommates played pretty fair trombone, the other played a good imitative piano, and Eddie himself was fair on a tenor banjo with ukulele stringing. Eddie also purchased a slightly used mellophone, hoping to duplicate the performance of Dudley — in the Weems record of 'Travelin' Blues', which Eddie regarded as about as good a swing number as ever was pressed into a disc. He never learned to play the mellophone, but sometimes on Saturday and Sunday nights the three friends would have a jam session, the three of them playing and drinking gin and ginger ale and playing, complimenting each other on breaks and licks or making pained faces when one or the other would play very corny. One night their doorbell rang and a young man who looked as though he were permanently drunk asked if he could come in and sit down. He brought with him a beautiful little Jewess. Eddie was a little hesitant about letting them in until the drunk said he only wanted to sit and listen.

'WELL!' shouted the roommates. 'Sit you down, have a drink. Have two drinks. What would you like to hear?'

'“Ding Dong Daddy,”' said the stranger. 'My name is Malloy. This is Miss Green. Miss Green lives upstairs. She's my girl.'

'That's all right,' they said. 'Sit down, fellow, and we'll render one for you.' They played, and when they finished Miss Green and Malloy looked at each other and nodded.

'I have drums,' said Malloy.

'Where? Upstairs?' said Eddie.

'Oh, no. Miss Green and I don't live together that much, do we, Sylvia?'

'Not that much. Almost but not quite,' said Sylvia.

'Where are they, the percussions?' said Eddie.

'At home in Pennsylvania, where I come from,' said Malloy. 'But I'll get them next week. Now do you mind if Sylvia plays?'

The boy with the trombone offered her his trombone. Eddie handed up the banjo.

'Wait a second, Baby. Don't get the wrong idea. It was my fault.'

'Stop being a God-damn gentleman. It ill becomes you. Come on, or I'll go alone and I won't let you in, either.'

'I'll go, but I was in the wrong and I want to say so. I apologize to you, Whatever Your Name Is -'

'Brunner.'

'And you, and you, and thank you for being - Anyway, I apologize.'

'All right.'

'But I still think I could take you.'

'Oh, now wait a minute, listen here,' said the piano player. 'If you want to settle this right now I'll go outside, or right here -'

'Oh, shut up,' said Eddie. 'You're as bad as he is. Good night. Good night.' When the door closed he turned on the piano player. 'He was all right at the end. He apologized, and you can't blame him for wanting to think he could lick you.'

'A wrong guy. If I ever see him again I'll punch his face in for him.'

'Maybe. Maybe it wouldn't be so easy if he was sober. He had to walk on a loose rug to take that haymaker at you, remember. I don't want to hear any more about it. The hell with it.'

'Ah, you give me a pain in the ass.'

'You took the very words right out of my mouth. All you tough guys,' said Eddie.

'Gee, but that little Mocky could play that piano,' said the trombone player.

That was the first of two meetings between Eddie Brunner and Jimmy Malloy. Eddie's life went on as usual for a while. He did a few drawings and sold none. His stuff was too good for a syndicate manager to take a chance on it; too subtle. But it was not the type of thing that belonged in the *New Yorker*, the only other market he could think of at the time. So the three friends would have their jam sessions, and some night when they did not play they would sit and talk. The names they would talk: Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer, Miff Mole, Steve Brown, Bob MacDonough, Henry Busse, Mike Pingatore, Ross Gorman and Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong and Arthur Shutt, Roy Bargy and Eddie Gilligan, Harry MacDonald and Eddie Lang and Tommy and Jimmy

Malloy. 'Listen, fellow, you're one to three here and we'd just give you a shellacking and throw you downstairs if we had to. But we wouldn't have to. My friend here is a fighter.'

'Make them shake hands,' said the trombone player.

'What for?' said Eddie. 'Why should they shake hands?'

'Let him go,' said the piano player.

'All right, let him go,' said Eddie to the trombone player. They let him go and Malloy went in after the piano player and stopped suddenly and fell and sat on the floor.

'You shouldn't have done that,' said the trombone player.

'Why not?' said the piano player.

'Why not? He asked for it,' said Eddie.

'Well, he's plastered,' said the trombone player.

'He'll be all right. I'm afraid,' said the piano player. He went over and bent down and spoke to Malloy. 'How you coming, K.O.?'

'Um all right. You the one that hit me?' said Malloy, gently caressing his jawbone.

'Yes. Here, take my hand. Get up before your girl gets back.'

'Who? Oh, Sylvia. Where is she?'

'She's still in the can.'

Malloy got up slowly but unassisted. He sat in a deep chair and accepted a drink. 'I think I could take you, sober.'

'No. No. Get that idea out of your head,' said the piano player.

'Don't be patronizing,' said Malloy.

'He can afford to be patronizing,' said Eddie. 'My friend is one of the best amateur lightweights on the Coast. Do you know where the Coast is?'

'Aw, why don't you guys cut it out. Leave him alone,' said the trombone player.

Sylvia appeared. 'Did you think I got stuck? I couldn't find the bathroom light. Why, Jimmy, what's the matter?'

'I walked into a punch.'

'Who? Who hit him? You? You big wall-eyed son of a bitch?'

'No, not me,' said the trombone player.

'Then who did? *You!* I can tell, you sorehead, because I showed you how to play piano you had to assert your superiority some way, so you take a sock at a drunk. Come on, Jimmy, let's get out of here. I told you I didn't want to come here in the first place.'

available corner; showing newsreels and short subjects for a nickel. A half-hour show, and turn them out. That did not give them much for their money, as it meant only one short and two newsreels, but on the other hand it was a lot for their money. A nickel? What did they want for a nickel? It was only a time killer anyway. He was in Hollywood ostensibly working on this project at the time the grim reaper called. No papers had been signed, and he hadn't seen the top men, but he was going to let them know he was in town tomorrow or the day after, and this party was just a little informal get-together with a couple of football coaches and golf professionals and what are known in the headlines as Film Actresses – extra girls. He had all the confidence in the world, and not without some reason. A man who is able to show the motion picture producers one example of how he called the turn of the public fancy can sell them practically anything, so long as he calls it Showmanship. But no papers had been signed.

'Your mother's going to stay with Aunt Ella and me for the present,' Eddie's uncle told him, and that settled a problem for Eddie. He did not want to stay around his mother. He loved her because she was his mother and sometimes he felt sorry for her, but all his life (he had realized at a time when he was still too young for such a realization) she was so engrossed in her own life work of observing the carryings-on of her husband, that she was like some older person whom Eddie knew but who did not always speak to him on the street. She was a member of a Pioneer Family, which in California means what Mayflower Descendant means in the east. The Mayflower Descendants, however, have had time to rest and recover from the exhausting, cruel trip, and many have done so, although inbreeding did not speed recovery. But the Pioneers had a harder trip and not so long ago, and it is reasonable to suppose that many of their number were so weakened when they got as far as the Pacific littoral that they handed down a legacy of tired bodies. Roy Brunner had come out from Kansas on a train, and his wife became his wife – a little to his surprise – the first time he asked her. She'd never been asked before, and was afraid she never would be again. She would willingly have learned, in married life, the one important thing her husband was able to teach her, but he was tolerantly impatient with her, and went elsewhere for his fun. When it came time to acquaint Eddie with

Dorsey and Fletcher Henderson, Rudy Wiedoeft and Isham Jones, Rube Bloom and Hoagy Carmichael, Sonny Greer and Fats Waller, Husk O'Hare and Duilio Sherbo, and other names like Mannie Kline and Louis Prima, Jenney and Morehouse, Venuti, Signorelli and Cress, Pee-wee Russell and Larry Binion; and some were for this one and some for that one, and all the names meant something as big as Wallenstein and Flonzaley and Ganz do to some people.

Early in October of that year Eddie got a telegram from his mother: PAPA DIED OF A STROKE THIS MORNING FUNERAL SATURDAY PLEASE COME. Eddie counted the words. He knew his mother; she probably thought the indefinite article did not cost anything in a telegram. He overdrew at the bank and cashed a cheque large enough to take him home, cashed it in an uptown speakeasy where he was known. He went home, and his maternal uncle told him how his father had died; in the middle, or the beginning maybe, of a party in a Hollywood hotel, surrounded by unknown Hollywood characters. They kept that from Eddie's mother, who had been such a sad stupid little woman for so many years that she could have taken it without shock. All she said, over and over again, as they made plans for the funeral was: 'I don't

it. He knew there had to be licences and other details, and he did not have the money for a licence. He tried to be an actor, saying he could play comedy character parts. The only time he was picked he revealed right away that he had had no experience: he did not know what a side was, nor anything else about the stage. One night, very hungry, he allowed himself to be picked up by a fairy, but he wanted his meal first and the fairy did not trust him, so he punched the fairy one for luck and felt better, but wished he had had the guts to take the fairy's bankroll. He sold twenty-five cent ties in fly-by-night shops and was a shill at two auctions but the auctioneer decided he was too tall; people would remember him. Then, through his landlady, for whose children he sometimes drew funny pictures, he heard of a marvellous opportunity: night man in a hotel which was more of a whore-house. It was through her Tammany connexion that she heard about the job. He operated a switchboard and ran the elevator from six in the evening to eight in the morning, for ten dollars a week and room, plus tips. Customers would come in and the password was, 'I'm a friend of Mr Stone's.' Then Eddie would look the customer over and ask him whom he wanted to see, and the man would give the name of one of the three women. Eddie then would call the room of the woman named, and say: 'There's a friend of Mr Stone's here for you,' and she would say all right, and Eddie would say: 'She says she's not sure she remembers you. Will you describe her to me?' And the man would either describe her or say quite frankly that he'd never been there before, and all this was stalling. It gave Eddie a chance to look him over carefully and it gave the woman a chance to prepare to entertain the visitor, or get dressed and get ready to be raided, if Eddie pulled back the switchboard key which rang her room. He was instructed to turn down men who were too drunk, as the place was not paying the kind of protection that had to be paid by clip joints. Eddie never turned anyone down.

On this job he met Gloria. She came in one night, plastered, with a sunburned man, also plastered, who wore in his lapel the boutonniere of the Legion of Honour. Eddie was a little afraid of him at first, but he guessed it would be too early in the season for a cop to have the kind of tan this man had. And the man said: 'Tell Jane it's the major. She'll know.' Jane knew and told Eddie to send him right up. The girl, Gloria, went with him. Eddie made

the facts of sexual life, and Roy acquainted him with them, his wife said to him: 'How did you tell him?' The reason she asked was that she still had hopes at that time of finding out herself. But Roy's answer was: 'Oh, I just told him. He knew a lot already.'

Eddie knew that in his mother his uncle was figuring on a profitable paying guest. That annoyed him a little, but what was there to do? She wanted to be there, and it took care of everything satisfactorily. Mrs Brunner gave Eddie five hundred dollars out of her own money, and having signed a power of attorney in favour of his uncle, Eddie returned to New York, believing that his allowance would continue.

It never came again. His father's estate was tangled enough, and the Crash fixed everything fine. Eddie's uncle was hit, though not crippled. He wrote to Eddie, who was a month and a half behind in the rent with a lease to run exactly a year longer. He told Eddie they all were comparatively lucky. 'You are young,' he said, 'and can earn your own living. I hope you will be able to send your mother something from time to time, as we can give her a roof over her head, a place to sleep and eat but nothing else. . . .'

Eddie sold his car for \$35, he hocked his beautiful mellophone for \$10. He gathered together, early in December, all his money and found he had not quite \$200. His roommates had jobs and they were more than willing to have him keep his share of the apartment and owe them his share of the rent, but in January one of them lost his job in the first Wall Street purge, and in March they all were ousted from their apartment.

They went their separate ways. One of the roommates had a married sister living somewhere in suburban New Jersey. He went there. The other, the fighter, died of pneumonia in a room off Avenue A. Eddie did not even hear about it until long after his friend's body had been cremated. Eddie went from rooming-house to rooming-house, in the Village at first, and then in the West Forties, among the Irish of Tenth Avenue. He stayed uptown because it saved a dime carfare every day. He tried every place, everyone he knew to get a job. He was a helper in a restaurant one week, picking dirty plates off tables and carrying trayfuls of them to the kitchen. He dropped a tray and was fired, but he paid something on his rent and he had kept his belly full. He thought of driving a taxi, but he did not know how to go about

'I have something belonging to you, Miss Wandrous.'

'What!'

'Your purse, you left it in Jane's room when you left in such a hurry. That's why you had to borrow the buck, remember? I took the liberty of trying to identify the owner, but I couldn't find you in the phone book. I didn't think I would.'

'Oh!'

'I was going to take a chance that you were still living at the address on your driver's licence. You better get a new licence, by the way. The 1928 licences aren't any good any more. This is 1930.'

'Did you show this to anybody?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I just didn't think it was anybody else's business. It wasn't mine, for that matter, but it's better for you to have *me* look at it than turn it over to, well, one of the boys we have around here sometimes.'

'You're a good egg. I just happened to think who it is you remind me of.'

'I know.'

'Do you?'

'I ought to. I've heard it often enough.'

'Who?'

'Lindbergh.'

'Yes, that's right. I guess you would hear that a lot. When is your night off?'

'The second Tuesday of every week.'

'No night off? I thought they had to give you a night off.'

'They break a lot of ordinances here, ordinances and laws. Why, what do you want to know about my nights out for?'

'We could have dinner.'

'Sure. Do you think I'd be here if I could take girls out to dinner?'

'Who said anything about taking me? I just said we could ~~have~~ dinner. I have no objection to paying for my own ~~dinner~~ ^{dinner} under certain circumstances.'

'For instance.'

'For instance eating with someone I like.'

the wise guess that this was Gloria's first time here, but not her first experience being a spectator. The major kept smiling to himself in the elevator, humming, and saying to Gloria: 'All right, honey?'

The major gave Eddie a dollar when they reached Jane's floor, gave it to him as though that were the custom from time immemorial. Eddie returned to the switchboard. Then in about twenty minutes he heard footsteps, and standing before him was the girl, Gloria.

'Will you lend me that dollar he gave you?' she said. 'Come on, I'll give it back to you. You don't want any trouble, do you?'

'No. But how'll I know you'll give it back to me? Honestly, I need that buck.'

'You don't have to pimp for your money, I imagine.'

'That's where you're wrong, but here, take it.'

'I'll bring it back tomorrow. I'll give you two bucks tomorrow,' she said. 'What are you doing here, anyway?'

'You mean what is a nice girl like me doing in a place like this,' said Eddie.

'Good night,' she said, 'and thanks a million.'

He had a feeling she would return the money, and she did, two nights later. She gave him five dollars. She said she didn't have change for it, and he took it. 'What happened the other night, anything?' she said.

'Your friend got stinko and Jane had to send out for a bouncer,' he said.

'Oh, you're not the bouncer?'

'Do I look like a bouncer?'

'No, but -'

'But I don't look like an elevator boy in a whore-house either, is what you're trying to say.'

'Are you from the west?'

'Wisconsin,' said Eddie.

'What part of Wisconsin?'

'Duluth,' said Eddie.

'Duluth is in Minnesota.'

'I know,' said Eddie.

'Oh, in other words mind my own business. Okay. Well, I just asked. I'll be seeing you.'

and so people associated the Fitzgerald people with the Held drawings. The Fitzgerald people did not go in for decorated yellow slickers, decorated Fords, decorated white duck trousers and stuff like put-and-take tops and fraternity pins and square-toed shoes and Shifter movements and trick dancing and all the things that caught on with the Held people. The Held people *tried* to look like the Held people; the Fitzgerald-Fellows people were copies of the originals.

The average man, Mr Average Man, Mr Taxpayer, as drawn by Rollin Kirby *looks* like the average New York man making more than \$5,000 a year. He wears Brooks clothes, including a Herbert Johnson hat, which is a pretty foreign-looking article of apparel in Des Moines, Iowa, where J. N. Darling is the cartoonist; but in New York, Kirby's territory, the Kirby taxpayer is typical. He is a man who wears good clothes without ever being a theatre-programme well-dressed man; it is easy to imagine him going to his dentist, taking his wife to the theatre, going back to Amherst for reunion, getting drunk twice a year, having an operation for appendicitis, putting aside the money to send his son to a good prep school, seeing about new spectacles, and looking at, without always being on the side of, the cartoons of Rollin Kirby. But no one would call this man a symbol of middle age or American Taxpayer. If he walked along the streets of Syracuse or Wheeling or Terre Haute he would be known as a stranger. He would be picked out as a stranger from a bigger city, and probably picked out as a New Yorker. And a Held flapper would have embarrassed any young snob who took her to a Princeton prom. And a Fellows young man, driving up in his Templar phaeton to the Pi Beta Phi house at a Western Conference University would have been potted by the sorority girls even before they saw the Connecticut licence on his car. There *are* typical men and women, young and old, but only editorial writers would be so sweeping as to pick out a certain girl or a certain boy and call him a symbol of modern youth.

There could be a symbol of modern young womanhood, but the newspapers would not be likely to print her picture. She would have to be naked. The young girl who was about twenty years old in the latter half of the 1920s did conform to a size. She was about five feet five, she weighed about 110. She had a good body. There

'Now we're getting somewhere,' he said, but he could not prolong the flippancy. This was the first time in months that anyone had spoken a kind personal word to him. She understood that.

'Get somebody to work for you, can't you?'

'Why should I? . . . Hell, why shouldn't I? There's a jiggaboom had this job before me is working down the street now. He just runs the elevator at a hotel now, maybe he might work for me if they said it was all right. I don't want to lose this job, though.'

The Negro said he would be glad to take over Eddie's job for a night, and Mrs Smith, Eddie's boss, said it would be all right but not to make a practice of it, as the girls upstairs did not like Negroes for agents.

Thus began the friendship of Gloria and Eddie.

*

It would be easy enough to say any one of a lot of things about Gloria, and many things were said. It could be said that she was a person who in various ways - some of them peculiar - had the ability to help other people, but lacked the ability to help herself. Someone could write a novel about Gloria without ever going very far from that thesis. It was, of course, the work of a few minutes for the 1931 editorial writers (who apparently are the very last people to read the papers) to find in Gloria a symbol of modern youth. She was no more a symbol of modern youth than Lindbergh was a symbol of modern youth, or Bob Jones the golfer, or Prince George, or Rudy Vallée, or Linky Mitchell, or DeHart Hubbard or anyone else who happened to be less than thirty years old up to 1930. There can be no symbol of modern youth any more than there can be a symbol of modern middle age, and anyway symbol is a misnomer. The John Held Jr caricature of the 'flapper' of the 1920s, or the girls and young men whom Scott Fitzgerald made self-conscious were not symbols of the youth of that time. As a matter of fact there was no tie-up between the Scott Fitzgerald people and the John Held people. The Scott Fitzgerald people were drawn better by two artists named Lawrence Fellows and Williamson than by John Held. Held drew caricatures of the boys and girls who went to East Orange High School and the University of Illinois; the Held drawings were caricatures and popular,

and never thought of the saints except as ~~men~~ ~~men~~ ~~men~~

Her uncle, a man named William R. Vandamm (his name was Pierre), was the older brother of her mother. He had been a classmate of Gloria's father at Cornell University, and Gloria's father had gone to Chile after college, and had stayed long enough to hate it jointly and break their ~~marriage~~ ~~marriage~~ ~~marriage~~. They came back together and Wandrous married Vandamm's sister. There was a little money on all sides, and both bride and groom brought equal advantages to the union, and it was one of those obscure, respectable marriages that take place every Sunday. When Wandrous died it was Vandamm who went to the radium company and used his Masonic and professional and political connexions to see to it that money was provided for the upbringing and education of Gloria. They wanted to give the widow stock in the radium company, but Vandamm was too smart for that and thereby lost close to a million dollars, as it later turned out, but Vandamm was the only one who noticed that, and he did not call his sister's attention to it.

Vandamm was a good enough industrial chemist, and a very good uncle. He lived away most of the time while Gloria was a small child. He would take a job, hold it a year or so, and then take a better job, gaining in money and experience and acquaintance. He would live in men's clubs and Y.M.C.A.s all over the country, taking half of his annual vacation at Christmas so that he could spend the holidays with his sister and niece. He would bring home beautiful presents, usually picked by one of the succession of nice young women to whom he was attentive. In every town where he worked it was the same. He was clean and respectable and had a good job, and he was unmarried. So he would single out one of the young women he met, and he would be polite to her and take her to nice dances and send her flowers, and tell her all the time what a wonderful thing this friendship was. Each time he quit his job and moved to another town he would leave behind a bewildered young woman, who had had him to her house for Sunday dinner fifty times in a year, but had nothing to show for it, candy and flowers being the perishable things that they are. There were two exceptions: one was a young woman who fell in love with him and did not care how much she showed it. He had to depart from his Platonic policy in her case, because she was making what were

must be a reason for the fact that so many girls fitted that description, without regard to their social classification. And the reason may well be that between 1905 and 1915 the medical profession used approximately the same system in treating pregnant women and in the feeding and care of infants. Even the children of Sicilian and Ghetto parentage suddenly grew taller, so the system must have been standard; there seems to be no other explanation for this uniformity. It is noticeable in large families: the younger children, born during and after the World War, are almost invariably tall and slender and healthier than their older brothers and sisters.

Gloria missed by ten years being a 'flapper'; that is, if she had been born ten years sooner she might have qualified in 1921 as a flapper, being twenty-two years old, and physically attractive. One of the differences between Gloria as she was and as she might have been was that in 1921 she might have been 'considered attractive by both sexes', and in 1931 she was considered attractive by both sexes, but with a world of difference in the meaning and inner understanding of it.

It has been hinted before that there was a reason for the recurring mood of despair which afflicted Gloria. When Gloria was eleven years old she was corrupted by a man old enough to be her father. At that time Gloria and her mother and uncle were living in Pittsburgh. Her father, a chemist, had been one of the first people to die of radium poisoning. The word father, spoken with any tenderness or sentimental intent, always evoked a recollection of her father's college class picture. It was the only picture her mother had of her father, as something had happened to their wedding pictures when they were moving from one house to another. The class picture was not much help to a child who wanted to be like other children; she saw her father as a man with a white circle around his head, in the second row of three rows of young men standing on the steps of a stone building. Through her childhood she could not see a haloed saint's picture without thinking of the picture of her father, but she would wonder why the halo did not go around the front and under the chin of the saint, and why the white circle around her father's head did not end at the shoulders the way it did with the saints; and thinking first one thing and then the other she never thought of her father as a saint;

made Vandamm understand why she would not have him; there was someone else.

The arrival of the World War was propitious for Vandamm, who was getting a little tired of all but the freedom part of his freedom. He was beginning to hate the visits to the drug store on Saturday night; he hated not being able to go right to sleep; he hated keeping his mind active so that he would not be led into a proposal of marriage. He detested the little university club he lived in. He hated American accents. In no town that he ever lived in had he made an impression on the first three families. He could see, when he met them, how they regarded him: an easterner who wasn't good enough for the east and thought he would be a king among monkeys rather than a monkey among kings. He decided he had had enough experience, and from now on would make money.

He went to Pittsburgh and had no trouble getting a job. In the war years he made excellent salaries and he and his sister bought a house in the East End. It turned out that he had to move again, this time to Wilmington, Delaware, but his visits home – and he thought of it as home – were more frequent than they had been. One of the results of these frequent visits was his discovering that he adored his niece. He never would have put it that way. Even love was a word he had schooled himself against using. But he began to look forward to seeing her every time she was out of his sight. Here was someone he could love without watching what he said and did. It was such a relief after the long cautious years. What started it was the child's beauty, and he took pride in the relationship. She photographed well and he carried snapshots of her in his wallet. He was glad she was not his daughter, because he could love her more. Fathers *have to* love their daughters and sometimes there is nothing else, but an uncle can love his little niece, and they can be friends, and she will listen to him and he can be as extravagant with her as he pleases. His sister was in favour of this obvious enthusiasm on the part of her brother, although she was not unaware that her brother more and more gave to her the status of a privileged governess.

The war, his work, the money it brought him – they were half his life. Gloria was the other half, that he did not talk much about.

He took his sister's money and doubled it for her, not really for

then known as goo-goo eyes at him every time she saw him, at parties or alone. At the risk of not being permitted to finish, he told her that she had made him feel as no other girl had made him feel, and for that reason he was quitting his job at the factory. If he stayed on, he said, he would be tempted to ask her something he had no right to ask her. Why had he no right to ask her? she wanted to know. Because of his sister and his niece. They had only what money he could give them, and never would have more. For that reason he hated to quit this job; he had been able to do things for them that he never had been able to do before. 'I will never marry,' he stated, as though it had national political significance. That fixed her. It also fixed him; instead of making him less attractive it made him look tall and husky, a philanthropist who gave millions in secret. It made her feel something she never had felt before. Before that she and all women like her were a little afraid that all bachelors were comparing all eligible women. But William he wasn't comparing. He had decided on her, even though he could not, because of his dependants, have her. It turned out to be only a question of time before he did have her. 'Take me,' she said, one moonlight night, and she threw her arms back. He wasn't quite ready to take her at that moment, but he was in a minute. For the rest of that year he would take her every Sunday night, after paying a visit to a drug store in another part of town every Saturday night. In nice weather they would wander casually in the backyard and dart suddenly into the carriage house. In bad weather they would have to wait until her father and mother had gone to bed, and then they would go down cellar. They would leave a scrub-bucket just inside the cellar door so that if anyone started to come down, whoever it was would knock the bucket down the steps with a warning racket. It was better in the carriage house, as she did not get her petticoat so dusty in a barouche as on the cellar floor.

The second exception was the girl in the next town he came to. He fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. She turned him down with such finality that she was sorry for him and suggested that they could still be friends. He snatched at this eagerly, and there was nothing he would not do for her. Years later he read about her. She and a married man, a doctor in the same 'set', died together in a Chicago hotel. The doctor shot her through the heart and then turned the revolver on himself. That, after all those years,

very young, Vandamm decided, to have had a daughter old enough to be married. The daughter lived in Trenton, but Boam never saw her. 'She has her own household to look after now,' Boam said. 'I don't like to go there as a father-in-law.' It sounded a little as though Boam were lonely, and that fitted in with Vandamm's plans. A lonely widower, young-middle-aged, well set up, good job probably if they gave him a major's commission right off the bat. 'How'd you like Major Boam?' Vandamm asked his sister. She liked him, she said. She judged men by their size. She liked a tall man better than a short man, and a tall husky man better than a tall thin man.

The Armistice interfered with Vandamm's plans. Major Boam took off his Sam Browne belt, his boots and spurs, his uniform with its two silver chevrons on the left sleeve. He stopped in to see Vandamm in Wilmington on his last trip around his circuit, and for the first time in the friendship he relaxed. Leading up to it in the most roundabout way, he finally said to Vandamm: 'Well, it's time I went out looking for a job.' It developed that Boam was not going back to some highly-paid position. He was not going back to anything. He told Vandamm that when the United States entered the war he wanted to be a dollar-a-year man, but that he couldn't afford it. He had had expenses in connexion with his daughter's marriage, and a lot of other things. The only way he could serve his country was to get a commission. Working for a major's pay was a financial loss, he said, and as much as he could do for his country. And now there was no job waiting for him.

This suited Vandamm. He told the major he would see to it that he got a job. The major thanked him and said he would try to use his own connexions first, and if nothing came of them Vandamm was not to be surprised if one fine day Boam turned up in Pittsburgh or Wilmington.

He turned up in 1921, not to ask for a job, but just to pay a social call. He had found a vague job with the political end of the chemical game, he said. The vague job was lobbying. Peace with Germany was about to be signed, and it was his job to see to it that when the German dye factories reopened they did not wreck the American dye industry, such as it was. This was difficult, he pointed out, because many of the German factories were American-owned, or had been until war was declared, and American

her but for Gloria. Then when he saw what he had done, he had what he thought was a brilliant idea. For the first time in his life he indulged the dangerous thrill of planning someone else's life. He wanted to get his sister married off. That would be all for the present. Get her married off, and then see what happened. But he could not stop thinking what might happen, and did not see why he should not enjoy his plans. His sister was young enough to have children, and if she had a child, a new baby, with a living husband, there was no telling what might happen. He reasoned that his sister ought to be glad to let him have Gloria. She would have a child of her own, and he would have Gloria. He would think later on about marriage for himself. If the right woman came along and Gloria liked her, and he liked her for Gloria, he might marry her. In the course of a few months of thinking along these lines Vandamm planned a whole new life for himself. He thought of it only as rearranging his own life, and never as deliberate, planned rearranging of the lives of anyone else, except little Gloria, who was, after all, so young. . . .

In Wilmington he had met a man, a major in the Army Ordnance Department. Major Boam was not like most of the men who without previous military experience walked into captaincies and majorities in the Ordnance Department and Quartermaster and Medical Corps; he looked well in uniform. He looked fit, healthy, strong. This man worked out of Washington, and spent most of his time in Wilmington, Eddystone, Bethlehem, and Pittsburgh. Vandamm remained a civilian all through the war. He was nearsighted, underweight, flat-footed, and the Army didn't want him. Not that they were rude about it; they wanted him to remain a civilian.

'Next time you're in Pittsburgh stop in and see my sister,' Vandamm told Major Boam. The major said he would be glad to, and did, and when next he saw Vandamm he said he had stopped in and had dinner with Mrs Wandrous, a very nice dinner. Vandamm wanted to know if he had seen Gloria, but the major said he had been so late that Gloria had been asleep, oh, hours, when he got there. To Vandamm that meant that Boam had arrived late and must have enjoyed himself if he stayed, and he found out that Boam had stayed until almost train-time.

Boam was a widower with a grown daughter. Must have married

and sat her down on his left leg. He held his left hand on her back and went on talking. As he talked his hands moved, now he would pat and squeeze her bare thighs, now he would pat her little behind. She looked up at him as he did these things, and he went on talking so interestedly and in such a strong, easy voice that she relaxed and laid her head on his shoulder. She liked the pressure of his hands, which did not hurt her the way some people's did. She liked the rumble of his voice and the smell of his clean white shirt and the feel of his soft flannel suit.

'Look,' said Vandamm, interrupting and indicating with a nod how relaxed Gloria was.

Boam nodded and smiled and continued what he was saying. In a little while Gloria fell asleep — it was past her bedtime. Her mother picked her up off Boam's lap, and Boam immediately jumped up.

He tried to stay away from the Wandrous-Vandamm home after that, but the harder he tried, the more excuses he invented. He would plan to go there after he was sure Gloria would be asleep; but then he would be saying: 'How's little Gloria?' and Vandamm would immediately say: 'Come up and see her when she's asleep.' Boam had business in Pittsburgh that was supposed to keep him there three or four days. He stayed a fortnight. All the time he knew what was happening to him. He did not know what he wanted to do with the child. He did know that he wanted to take her away, be alone with her.

Up to that time Gloria had been only another beautiful child, with a head of dark brown curly hair, and eyes that were startlingly beautiful at first glance, and then the longer you looked at them the more uninteresting they became. But each time you saw them anew you would be seeing for the first time how beautiful they were. Their beauty was in the set and the colour, and being dark brown and the eyes of a child, they did not change much and that was what made them uninteresting. Gloria was like most female children. She was cruel to animals, especially to dogs. She was not at all afraid of them until after they had made friends with her and then she would hit them with a stick, and after that she would be afraid of them, although for the benefit of her elders she would call nice doggy. A Negro hired girl named Martha would come out from Wiley Avenue every afternoon to take Gloria for her walk.

had to move carefully. There were some Americans who wanted their plants back nearly intact, and it was going to be a risky business if the Germans saw that the German dye industry was going to be discriminated against. Official Germany would not dare do anything, but the workers in the German dye factories could not be counted on to keep their sabotaging hands off the factories if they heard that their means of livelihood was being cut off in the American Congress. In other words there were two camps in America; one camp, those who had owned factories in Germany, didn't want Congress to take any tariff action until after they saw what was going to happen about the plants. The other camp consisted of the Americans who had more or less entered the dye industry for the first time when the British navy bottled up German maritime activity. These Americans had spent a lot of money building up our dye industry (under the tremendous handicap that the trade secrets of dye manufacture were kept in Germany), and they didn't want to see their money go to waste just because Germany was licked. What was the use of winning the God-damn war if we couldn't get something out of it?

And so Major Boam - who retained his military title partly because the hotel and restaurant people in Washington knew him as Major Boam, and partly because he thought it gave him standing with members of Congress - had been staying in Washington ever since the Harding Administration moved in. He spoke fraternally of Congress: 'We're getting a lot of work done down there. You wouldn't believe it the amount of work we're getting done - why, who is this?'

'This is Gloria. Say how do you do to Major Boam,' said Mrs Wandrous.

'How do you do,' said Gloria.

'Come here till I have a look at you,' said the major. He held out his hands, his big brown fat hands. 'Say, this is quite a young lady. How old is she? How old are you, Gloria?'

'I'm almost twelve,' she said.

'Come up here,' he said. 'Sit on my lap.'

'Oh now, Major, she'll be a nuisance,' said Mrs Wandrous.

'Well, if the Major wants her,' said Vandamm. 'Go on, Gloria, be sociable.'

'Shooooor she will,' said Major Boam. 'Ups!' He picked her up

'Very well, thank you,' she said.

'Come here and I'll read you the funny section,' he said, and picked up the paper. He nodded to the maid, who left.

Gloria went to him and stood between his legs while he sat and read comic strips. She had an attitude of attention, but no attention in her eyes. The pressure of her elbow on his leg was becoming unbearable, and he looked into her eyes as he would have looked into a woman's. She showed no fear. Was it possible that this child had - was Vandamm the kind of man - did that explain Vandamm's adoration of this child?

He stopped reading the paper. 'Let me feel your muscle,' he said. She made a muscle for him. 'Mm,' he said. 'That's quite a muscle for a girl.' Then a silence.

'All ready for the summer, aren't you?' he said.

'Yes,' she said.

'Not much on,' he said. Then panic and fright and haste came on him, and his hands went wild. He hit her so hard on the mouth that he hurt her and she could not say what else was going on, but she knew enough to suspect.

He tried to pass it off with acrobatics. He ~~tried to pass it off with acrobatics. He~~
air and spoke to her and tried to laugh. He ~~wanted to get out of~~
this house, but he was afraid. He had not ~~done anything to~~
her, but he was afraid of the story she ~~might tell~~
leave until he was sure she would not ~~run away~~
and babble something to the maid. ~~Then he went to the door~~
kissed you good-bye now, so I guess I'll ~~be home~~

She did not know what was the ~~real~~ real reason for it.

'You going to miss me?' he said. 'I'll miss you next time I come back. What would you like to do?'

'I don't know,' she said.

'Well, I'll bring you some _____
from New York, next time I _____
it?'

'Yes,' she said.

'Are you going to say ~~that~~

'Yes,' she said.

'Well.'

"Bye," she said.

'Tha-a-at's right. ~~Gone~~

The other children's nurses were white and they did not encourage the coloured girl to sit with them. They did like to have pretty little Gloria with them, and pretty little Gloria knew this, knew that her company was preferable to Martha's, so Martha had no control over her. Her mother did not try to exercise any control over her, except to see that she always looked nice before she went out. Barring only an occasional enema and trips to the dentist, Gloria's childhood was lived according to Gloria's rules. School was easy for her; she was bright, and any little brightness she displayed was rewarded out of proportion to its worth. She liked all little boys until they played rough, and she would fight any little boy who was being mean to a little girl, any little girl. There was one continual paradox all through her childhood: for a child who frequently heard herself called a little Princess she was very neglected. She had no one to create or to generate childhood love.

On the way out to Gloria's home Boam did not allow himself to think of what might happen, of what he hoped would happen. He had been out to the house every second day while he was in Pittsburgh, but this one sunny day he knew was to be the day. He knew he was going to do something. It was after lunch, and he had a hunch Mrs Wandrous would be out. She was. The maid who answered the door knew him, and when he did not seem disposed to leave when she said Mrs Wandrous was out, she asked him to come in. 'You don't know what time she'll be back?' he said.

'No, sir, but I don't imagine for quite a while. She went all the way downtown shopping. You only missed her by about a half an hour. Can I get you a cup of tea or something?'

'No, thanks, you go ahead with whatever you were doing. I'll just sit down a little while and if Mrs Wandrous doesn't come along. . . . Little Gloria out playing?'

'No, sir, she's in. The nurse-girl didn't come today. I'll send her in.'

'I'd like to say good-bye to her. I'm leaving tonight.'

The maid was only too glad to get rid of Gloria. She had her own work to do and Mrs Wandrous did not accept excuses when it wasn't done.

Gloria came running in and then stopped short and looked at him. Then she smiled faintly.

'How's my little girl today?' he said.

in the summer she went with these friends to a camp in Maine, which was run by two members of the school faculty. There were enough girls at the camp from other schools to keep her from getting tired of the same faces. Then back at school there were always new girls. She improved to such an extent that it was she who asked to be sent away to school. She wanted to go to school in California, but when it came down to giving reasons her only reason was that she loved a tune, 'Orange Grove in California', which was popular at the time. At that her uncle almost indulged this fancy, and would have had it not been for the - he trusted - momentarily depleted state of their finances. He tried to get a job in California, and found out for the first time that he was a lucky man; good men were working out there for monthly salaries smaller than the rent of his apartment in New York. And whatever chance there was of Gloria's being sent to California or anywhere west of the Hudson disappeared when two crimes of violence occurred within a week of each other, solidifying for all time Vandamm's inherent prejudice against the west. One crime was the Leopold-Loeb affair, which was too close a reminder of what had happened to Gloria; and the other was the suicide-pact of the woman and the doctor Vandamm had known long ago. A good, not spectacularly fashionable New England school was decided upon for Gloria. She was there almost the whole year before another man, who eventually made Boam seem like a guardian angel, was attracted to her.

*

When you are a year away from a day that (because of some Thing) was not like other days you are as far away from the day and as far away from the thing, good or bad, as you will ever get. If it is bad, it is far enough away. Its effect may last, but there is no use kidding yourself that you live the thing over again. Something is missing. One thing that is missing in living it is ~~the thing~~ is the reality; you know when you start that what you are ~~able to~~ recall is only, so far as this moment is concerned, a ~~kind of thing~~ thing. If a year ago you saw yourself cut open, your blood ~~running~~ out of you, and everything outside was pain coming in you - you still cannot live that over again. Not the day, and not the ~~thing~~ thing. You can and do live back to the moment when the ~~thing~~ thing whatever it was, began. Or the good thing ~~that~~ ~~was~~ ~~it~~

uncle I said good-bye to them, too.' He was tempted to give her money but some kind of hog's caution prevailed. He went away and he never came back, but he was remembered.

Gloria wanted to tell someone what he had done. The minute he left she forgot how he had hurt her with his teeth. She remembered his hand. She went to the kitchen and stood watching the maid, who was polishing silverware. She watched the maid and did not answer when the maid said: 'Well, what are you looking at?' She could not tell her.

It took a year for her to tell the story, which was doubted word by word by her mother and denied by her uncle. But Vandamm knew something was wrong, because Gloria suddenly did not like him or anything he bought her or did for her. He thought it had something to do with her age. She was twelve years old, and she might be having her menstruation earlier than most girls. Lot of reasons. She was moody. A little depressed always. You couldn't expect her to be a child all the time, though. But the story did come out, little by little, until mother and uncle were able to reconstruct the scene. They took Gloria to their doctor, but Gloria would not let him touch her. They had to take her to a woman physician. Vandamm hired a private detective to look up Boam, and instituted his own campaign to have Boam ousted from his job in Washington. This was not necessary. Boam had gone back to Washington after his maltreatment of the child, quit his job, and left no forwarding address. The private detective ascertained that Boam had got into another similar mess a year or two before the war. His daughter's fiancé found out about it and daughter and fiancé eloped and never saw her father. That was the reason he never went to see his daughter in Trenton.

There was no physical aftermath to the Boam incident, except that her mental state affected Gloria's general health. Vandamm thought it would be a good thing to move away from Pittsburgh. A change of scene. New York.

For three years New York turned out to be a good idea. They put Gloria in a High Church day school where the girls wore uniforms. Thus from the first day she was like all the other girls. Her mother took her to school every day and met her after school. Here Gloria was not the prettiest nor the brightest, and was singled out for no special attention. She made a few friends, and

man that you didn't even know what he looked like undressed, wanted to do the same things to you that little boys did - became final knowledge. It became knowledge that made up for your lack of curiosity, or your willingness to learn. Out of fear you did not want to find out too much when you were thirteen and fourteen, but you could always tell yourself that you knew quite a lot, something the other girls did not know.

The other girls respected Gloria for what they thought was genuine innocence. Children do respect that. All it was was that she did not want to hear talk, to ask questions, to contribute information. But it passed for true innocence. It deceived her mother as well as her contemporaries. When Mrs Wandrous had to tell Gloria what was going on inside her body she felt two ways about it: one was that it was partly an old story to a girl who had been 'violated' by a grown man; the other was that it was awful to have to remind the child that she had a sex. But she told her, and Gloria took the information casually (there was little enough information in what her mother told her) and without questions. Mrs Wandrous breathed with relief and hiked Gloria off to boarding school.

Coming down from school for the Spring vacation Gloria was with five other girls. It was a bad train and the day was not warm, and every time the train stopped a man who was sitting in a seat that was almost surrounded by the six girls would get up and close the door after the passengers who left the door open. After closing the door he would go back to his seat, the third away from the door, and begin to doze. All her life the sound of snoring fascinated and amused Gloria, and this man snored. It made her like this man, and at the next station-stop she got up and closed the door, as she was one seat nearer the door than he was. He smiled and nodded several times, and said thank-you. At Grand Central when her mother met her the man, carrying a brief-case and handbag, went to Mrs Wandrous, who greeted Gloria first off the train, and said: 'I want to compliment you on your little girl's manners and consideration. A very polite and well-mannered little girl,' he smiled and went away. Mrs Wandrous wanted to know who he was - he was either a clergyman or schoolteacher, she knew that, and thought he must be from Gloria's school. Gloria said she guessed she knew why he had said that, and told

not made up of many good things; at least we don't make milestones out of the good things as much as we do the bad). The still beautiful word poignant does not apply to ice cream, medals you won in school, a ride on a roller coaster, something handsome to wear, or 'The Star-Spangled Banner'; although 'The Star-Spangled Banner' comes closest. It is music, and poor old music, whether it's Bach or Carmichael, it knows when it starts that it is making a forlorn effort to create or recapture something that it of itself does not possess. Music is synthetic; so how can poor, lovely old music, which is the highest art, have by itself a fraction of the poignancy of an important day, an important event that day, in the life of a human being? The answer is it can't. You may shut your eyes for a second while the Maestro is conducting, but you will open them again, and to show how completely wrong you are in thinking that you have been listening to the music he brings out, you will catch yourself noticing that he has shifted the baton from his tired rheumatic right arm to his left. It is nothing to apologize for, however. Only a phony would say that he does not really notice the man Toscanini, but a phony would say it. A phony would think he gained by saying he could overlook the genius because he is a man, a human being. Who the hell wrote the music? A disembodied wraith?

We have had long and uncomfortable periods when we built chairs, forgetting that a chair is meant to be sat in. Music, too, is to be enjoyed, and we might as well face it: it must have human associations if it is to be enjoyed. The same way with love. It can happen to be pure when for one reason or more two people do not go to bed together; and sometimes it is enough, and better, that they do not go to bed together. Love *can* be as far away from the idea of going to bed together as hate is from the idea of killing. But a chair is meant to be sat in, music is good for what it does to you, love is sleeping together, hate is wanting to kill. . . .

Three years can pass, and for two of them Gloria can be safely away from the ability to live again the time with Major Boam. This is not to say that Boam did her a favour. He was bad for her because he made her different, inside herself, and made her have a secret that was too big for her but was not the kind she could share. But she got bigger and stronger, not in the metaphorical sense, and what she knew - that a man as big as Major Boam, a

Her uncle enjoyed her popularity because it was the easiest thing for him to do. He never had forgiven himself for bringing Boam into their home, but neither had he ever completely blamed himself. Gloria's current popularity made up for that, and Vandamm was liberal and always on her side in disputes between his sister and his niece.

Neither Mrs Wandrous nor Vandamm was getting any younger. Gloria won out on her refusal to go to college and on studying art in New York. They said they would see about the apartment. For the present they would move to a house in the Village which was theirs by inheritance, and fix up the top floor as a studio. Vandamm was trading luckily in the market at that time and he seriously thought Gloria had a real talent. She did have a kind of facility; she could copy caricatures by Hugo Gellert, William Auerbach-Levy, Covarrubias, Constantin Alajálov, Ralph Barton - any of the better-known caricaturists. That year she talked a great deal about going to the Art Students' League, but each time a new class would form she would forget to sign up, and so she went on copying caricatures when she had nothing else to do, and she also did some posing, always in the nude. But the thing that about that time became and continued for two or three years to be the most important was drinking. She became one of the world's heaviest drinkers between 1927 and 1930, when the world saw some pretty heavy drinking. The Dizzy Club, the Hotsy-Totsy, Tommy Guinan's Chez Florence, the Type & Print Club, the Basque's, Michel's, Tony's East Fifty-third Street, Tony's West Forty-ninth Street, Forty-two West Forty-nine, the Aquarium, Mario's, the Clamhouse, the Bandbox, the West Forty-fourth Street Club, McDermott's, the Sligo Slasher's, the Newswriters', Billy Duffy's, Jack Delaney's, Sam Schwartz's, the Richmond, Frank & Jack's, Frankie & Johnny's, Felix's, Louis', Phyllis's, Twenty-one West Fifty-third, Marlborough House - these were places where she was known by name and sight, where she awed the bartenders by the amount she drank. They knew that before closing she would be stewed, but not without a good fight. There was no thought of going on the wagon. There was no reason to go on the wagon. She drank rye and water all day long. When she remembered that she had not eaten for twenty-four hours she would go to a place where the eggs were to be trusted, order a raw

her mother. Her mother looked at the man, walking up the ramp, but her instinctive alarm did not last. 'There are good people in the world,' she told herself. It was easy for her to think thus; Gloria's manners were the personal pride and joy of her mother.

On the way back after the holiday Gloria was with one other girl, but they did not get seats together. She was displeased with the prospect of not talking to anyone all the way back, and very pleased when a man's voice said: 'We won't have to worry about the door in this nice weather.' It was the man who had snored. He asked her where she was going to school, said he knew two or three girls there, told her who they were, asked her what her studies were, asked her how she liked teachers in general, explained he was one himself if you could call a principal a teacher.

Not altogether by accident he was on the train that brought her back to New York at the end of school. She was with a lot of her friends but she saw him and spoke to him like an old friend. This time in Grand Central her mother was late, and he was lagging behind. She told her friend she would wait for her mother, and the man when he saw she was alone went to her and said he would see that she got a taxi. He could even give her a lift.

It was all too easy. Two days later she called at his hotel in the afternoon, and she was sent upstairs with a bellboy because the man had been a steady patron of the hotel, was known as a respectable schoolteacher, and probably was expecting her but forgot to say so. Within a month he had her sniffing ether and loving it. It, and everything that went on in that room.

She did not see him as often as she wanted to; they could be together only in New York. She stayed two more years in that school but did not finish her college preparatory course there. In May of the second year the house mistress found a bottle of gin in Gloria's room, and she was 'asked not to come back'. Her mother worried a little about this but attributed it to the fact that Gloria was getting to be very popular with boys, and deep down she was glad; she thought it indicated that the Boam business was a thing of the past. Gloria was immensely popular with boys, and in a less strict school she could have been intercollegiate prom-trotting champion. She went to another school, passed her College Boards for Smith, and then thought better of college. She wanted to study Art. In New York. With her own apartment.

'Bing-go, bing-go, bingo, bingo, bingo that's the ling-go.' Gloria would sing, and the young men would smile and join in a little weakly, drinking very hard until they could get like her, except that she could do these things while apparently not drunk. She was not invited to the weddings that they were ushering at, and there were times when she was not exactly a pest, but if she would only understand that a telephone call to a broker was important. On wedding days she would be waiting for them when they finally got away from the sailing of the French ships that in those days were well liked, but when they met her she would have a bill for drinks waiting for them that indicated she had been waiting too - since lunch. Not that she was poor. She always had fifteen or twenty dollars for taxis and things, and if you ran short, she would hand it right over. It was just that she was unthinking.

She used to see Weston Liggett sometimes. He would come in, sometimes alone, sometimes with a man, sometimes with women. He would stand at the bar, have his drinks, and behave himself. The second or third time she saw him she noticed he was looking at her longer than it was wise to do even in the best-regulated speak-easies. 'Who is that man you spoke to?' she said to the Yale boy.

'Oh, a fellow called Liggett. He was in college with my brother.' 'Yale?'

'Uh-huh. Yeah. He was one of the atha-letic boys. Crew.'

It meant that he could never pick her up, and she would never speak to him until they were properly introduced. He could see her every day of the year after that, but because they had connexions in common she would not have anything to do with him; and Liggett understood that and soon became a strange familiar face that Gloria saw unrecognizingly even when she was alone and he was alone. She might never have spoken to him had it not been for one accident: she got pregnant.

One night in the winter of 1929-30 she went home with the surviving two Yale boys. The others had gone back to the provinces to wait out the crash, but these two remained. This night they were prematurely drunk; the liquor was beginning to be harder to take. Gloria usually got undressed in the bathroom when she stayed at their apartment, and they would lend her pyjamas. Up to that point this night was as always. But when she lay down on the sofa Bill said: 'Come on over and sleep with me.'

egg, break it in an Old Fashioned cocktail tumbler, shoot Angostura bitters into it, and gulp the result. That night she would have dinner: fried fillet of sole with tartar sauce. Next day, maybe no food, maybe bouillon with a raw egg. Certain cigarettes gave her a headache. She would smoke Chesterfields or Herbert Tareytons, no others. For days at a time she would have no sex life, tying up with a group of young Yale remittance men who in their early twenties were sufficiently advanced alcoholics to make it desirable to their families that they stay in New York. It was understood and agreed that the big thing in life was liquor, and while she was with these young men she believed and they believed that she was — well, like a sister. You did not bother her. Only one disgusting little fat boy, who came on from the Middle West twice a year, ever did bother her, but he stopped when he saw it was not the thing to do. The other young men were in the stock market from noon to closing, by telephone. By three-thirty they knew how they stood: whether to celebrate at Texas Guinan's or to drown their sorrows every other place. There was considerable riding around in automobiles with non-New York licence plates, but the cars seldom got out of the state except during football season. The summers were fun in New York. Planters' Punches. Mint Juleps. Tom Collinses. Rickeys. You had two or three of these to usher in the season, and paid a visit or two to the beer places, and then you went back to whiskey and water. What was the use of kidding yourself? Everything was done at a moment's notice. If you wanted to go to a night club to hear Helen Morgan or Libby Holman you made the decision at midnight, you scattered to dress, met an hour later, bought a couple of bottles, and so to the night club. The theatre was out. The movies, a little. Private parties, no, unless they were something special. Weddings, by all means. The young men were happiest when they could arrive at '42', stewed and in cutaways, 'glad to be back with decent people, not these people that think champagne is something to drink.'

'Down with Princeton!' Gloria would say.

'Down with Princeton,' the young men would say.

'To hell with Harvard!' Gloria would say.

'The hell with Harvard,' the young men would say.

'Hurrah for our side!'

'Hurrah for our side.'

that place with him. His name turned out to be O'Brien or Kelly or some Irish name, but by the time she learned this she had learned too many other things about him.

Many men had the pleasure of sleeping with Gloria in the year 1930, and Eddie was the only one who could have who didn't. He began by being afraid of getting a social disease, and then when Gloria became a friend he thought he saw something in her that he did not want to sleep with. He saw a kid sister. When they were together, going to the movies, having breakfast, having a couple of beers or a highball at his house, he would feel that he was in the presence of the real Gloria. The other part of her life was shut out. They would talk about the things of their childhood (it is always a wonderful thing to discover with someone through memories of childhood how small America is). 'When you were a kid did you count out by saying Ibbity-bibbity-sibbity-sab, ibbity-bibbity-kanah-ba, or did you just say eenie-meenie?'

'We said ibbity-bibbity.'

'When you were a kid did you yell at girls named Marguerite like this: "Marguerite, go wash your feet, the Board of Health's across the street"?''

'No, we never yelled that.'

'Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me went out the river to swim. Adam and Eve were drowned and who was saved?'

'Pinch-Me.' Then: 'Ouch!'

'Did you go to dancing school?'

'Oh, sure.'

'Did your fella used to carry your ballet slippers for you in the fancy bag?'

'I didn't have a fella.'

'Brothers and sisters I have none, but this man's -'

'Oh, God, I could never do those.'

Or long stories beginning: 'Once when I was a kid -' about killing a snake or breaking a finger or almost saving someone's life. They would talk about the stories in *The American Boy*, both of them having been great admirers of Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd, the stuttering fat boy created by Clarence Budington Kelland; and the Altschuler Indian stories, and the girls of Bradford Hall, and Larry the Bat and Silver Nell - wasn't that her name? In the Jimmie Dale stories? They were for older people, but after

'All right,' she said.

She picked up her pillow and dragged her comforter after her and got into bed with him. She turned her back and settled herself but she knew immediately that Bill was not going to be pal Bill tonight. He was holding her too close for any doubt about that. She let him worry for a few minutes, and then she turned around and put her arms around him and kissed him. After all, they had been friends a long time, and she liked Bill.

She also liked Mike, who was in the other bed, and not missing a thing. 'How about me, Gloria?' he said.

'All right,' she said.

Then they called up another girl, or rather Gloria did. The girls they called would not come over at that hour, but Gloria knew one who would, so long as there was another girl. It was all a lot more than the Yale boys anticipated, and it put an end to the drinking companionship. After that night, which was no unpleasant, Gloria went into another phase of her life; although it was in a way a return to a former phase. The next day, when she and Jane left the boys' apartment, Gloria went with Jane to a date Jane had, and the man got another man and Gloria never went out with the Yale boys again. She meant to, they meant to but it was time she was moving on.

It was the summer of that year, 1930, when she met Eddi Brunner. She had gone to the place where he worked with 'the major' because she had met the major in a speakeasy and had the sudden fear that he might be Major Boam and she might not be recognizing him. In all her life she had met only one other major and that was Boam, and it became a terribly important thing to find out if this could be he. What if she had forgotten that man's face? It was the first time she had thought of the possibility of having forgotten Boam's face, and when the thought came she had to admit that she might easily have seen Major Boam on the street without recognizing him. This major turned out not to be Boam, but not immediately. When she asked him his name (it was lost in the mumble of a speakeasy introduction) he told her it didn't make any difference, just call him Major. That was enough to strengthen her fear that it could be Boam without her recognizing him. For the rest of the night she pestered him for his name, and he amiably refused to tell her unless she went to this place

mother that she was staying with a friend uptown). A bad thing about days like that was to come out of a speakeasy in the afternoon and find it still daylight, and she would hurry downtown to fill in the remaining daylight with a bath and a change of clothes. The place where she encountered Liggett was a converted carriage house, with no character except for that. It was patronized by kept women and people in moderately good circumstances who lived in the vicinity. Gloria went there when some people she knew telephoned her and said they were all meeting there instead of another place. She went there – it was about nine-thirty in the evening – and discovered she was alone except for a couple, a sort of military grandfather and a young woman out to take him for whatever could be got out of him. Gloria said to the husky Italian who let her in: 'I'm meeting Mrs Voorhees and her party. I'll wait for her at the bar.' She had a drink and was smoking and in walked Liggett. He sat at the other end of the bar, munching potato chips and drinking Scotch and soda. When he recognized Gloria he picked up his drink and joined her. 'We've never met, but I've seen you so often –'

'Yes, with Billy.'

'I went to college with his brother.'

'Yes, he told me.'

'My name is Liggett.'

'He told me that, too. I'm Gloria Wandrous.' The bartender relaxed then.

'Wandrous. I'll bet people – it's so much like wondrous.'

'Yes, they think I made it up, like Gladys Glad and Hazel Dawn and Leatrice Joy, names like that. I didn't though. It's spelt with an a. W, a, n, d, r, o, u, s, and it's pronounced Wan-drous, pale and wan.'

'Not pale and won.'

'Mm. Not bad. Not *good*, but not bad.'

'Well, I don't make any pretence of being a wit. I'm just a hard-working business man.'

'Oh, are business men working again? I hadn't heard.'

'Well, not as much as we'd like to. What I was leading up to was, I suppose you have a date.'

'You didn't think I came in here every night, the mysterious veiled lady that always sits alone sipping her apéritif?'

reading them Eddie had gone around sticking grey seals all over the neighbourhood. What kind of car did Gloria have? No car, until she was twelve or something like that, then her uncle bought a Haines, which he traded in on a National. Oh, but those weren't old cars. Eddie's father had a Lozier, an Abbott-Detroit, a Stutz Bearcat (which he smashed up three weeks after he bought it), a Saxon, an Earl, a King Eight - always buying cars. Of course a lot of Fords, a second-hand Owen Magnetic, and an airplane. He won the airplane as a gambling gain, but he was afraid to learn to fly. Had Gloria played Diabolo? Once, and got knocked on the head. Did you ever sell Easter egg dyes to win a motion picture camera? Did you ever know anyone who won a real Shetland pony by selling subscriptions to some magazine? No, but she had saved bread wrappers and won a pushmobile. What were your words for going to the bathroom? Did you ever really know a boy who robbed birds' nests? No, that was like people making bathtub gin. Neither of them ever had seen gin made in a bathtub.

'I love you, Eddie darling,' she would say.

'I love you, Gloria,' he would say, but always wanting to say more than that, like: 'No matter what they say about you,' or 'I wish I'd known you five years sooner,' or 'Why don't you pull yourself together?'

She knew that and it had a sterilizing effect, which was what they wanted, but no good when they had it. 'Eddie,' she would say, to change the subject, 'why don't you go to a dentist? You're going to lose that tooth and it'll spoil your smile. Go to my dentist tomorrow, now will you promise?'

He would take her home, but they knew she would go right out again, and after these happy evenings that always ended with their knowing they had nothing to look forward to, the next man who had her would say to himself: 'Well, I thought I knew everything, but after all the places I've been, all the women, a kid, an American kid. . . .'

Because of the Yale boys she had an abortion, and after that many benders. The night she picked up Weston Liggett for the first time she was coasting along from a bender which had begun after seeing Eddie. She had been home twice during this bender to change her clothes (she long since had had it well understood at home that she did not like to be questioned when she told her

'Is anybody hungry?' said one of the Messrs 'Zoom'. 'I'm gonna order some food. A nice filet mignon.'

'That's not very nice after the dinner we had at my house.'

'Squop chicken? I never get enough to eat when I eat squop chicken. I told you that when we sat down. You gotta give me that. I told you when we sat down, I said frankly I said this is not my idea of a meal, squop chicken. I'm a big eater. Were you in the Army, Mr Liggett?'

'Uh-huh.'

'Then you know how it is. One thing I said to myself in France. I promised myself if I ever got back home the one thing I was never gonna do was go hungry. When I want to eat I eat.'

'Watch this trick,' said Mrs Voorhees. The other Mr was doing a trick. You balance a fifty-cent piece on the rim of a glass with a dollar bill between the coin and the glass. You snatched the dollar bill out from under the coin and — if the trick is successful — the coin remains balanced on the glass. 'Fascinating,' said Mrs V.

'I can do a better one than that with friction. You get friction in your fingers —'

'Shhhhhh. I can't even get it to stay on the glass, let alone make it stay after you pull the bill away. You have a wonderful sense of — I think I do want something to eat, after all. Waiter, have you any uh, that uh, you know, begins with a Z? It's a dessert.'

'Zabag —'

'That's it. I'll have some. Nothing for you, Mary?'

'I know one with friction. You get friction in your fingers by rubbing them on the table-cloth. Wait till he puts the table-cloth on the table and I'll show you. And you have to have a fork or a spoon. That's the idea of it. You lift up the spoon with the —'

'Listen, Hoover's all right.'

'Will you look at that old fool. Can't he see she's making a fool out of him? I'm glad my father died before he was old enough —'

'I'm sorry, Madame, the chef says —'

'Look at him. Does he get any thrill out of that?'

'It's exactly like the old place. Exactly. The only difference is it's on the uptown side now instead of the downtown side. It used to be on the downtown side but *now* it's on the *uptown*. I think they were terribly smart to preserve the same atmosphere. I said —'

'That's exactly what I thought, or hoped. I thought you came here to get away from the usual places -'

'Place, as far as you and I are concerned.'

'Right. But now look here, Miss Wandrous, don't dodge the issue. Here is a hard-working business man with Saturday night as free as the air -'

'As free as the air. I have a friend a writer, he'd like to use that some time. As free as the air. That's good.'

'You won't go places with me, then?'

'Why go places? Isn't this all right?' she said. 'No, Mr -'

'Liggett.'

'Mr Liggett. No, I'm waiting for some people. It'll probably be all right if you join us. You can sit here till they come and I'll introduce you to those I know.'

'Oh, you don't know them. Maybe you won't like them.'

'That's possible - here they are, or at least it sounds like. Hello, there.'

'Gloria darling, you've never been so prompt. Why, Weston Lee-gett. I didn't know you knew each other. Weston, why, you dog, you've broken up my party, but it's all right. That means we have an extra man. See now. Gloria, this is Mr Zoom, and uh, Mr Zoom, and you know Mary and Esther, and, everybody, this is Weston Liggett, a great friend of Peter Voorhees. Didn't you go to school together or something?'

'Prep school. Look, I don't want to mess up your party. I'll - let me buy you a drink, and -'

'There are four more people coming down from my house,' said Mrs Voorhees. 'Elaine and three men, so you really will be an extra man when we all get here. Oh, I wonder what I want to drink. A Stinger, I think. Elaine, if those men knew *you* were going to be here they wouldn't have waited with Elaine.'

'They knew,' said Gloria.

'Only by name. Isn't she lovely, Weston? She's young enough to be your daughter, Weston. You know that, don't you? You're not pretending otherwise, I hope.'

'I'm going to adopt her,' said Liggett. 'That's what we're here for, a few papers to sign and she's my daughter.'

'What do you want with two more daughters I'd like to know?'

of supplying liquor at huge financial profit - powerful radio stations, powerful speedboats and other craft not unlike the British 'Q' ships, powerful weapons against hijackers, powerful connexions in the right places. And often very good liquor and enough good wine to set in front of the people who knew good wine and still cared about it.

Having got thoroughly drunk, picking up couples and dropping them, joining parties and deserting them. Gloria and Liggett went to his apartment as the last place to go. He had been wondering all night how he was going to suggest a hotel. He thought it over and thought it over, and kept putting it off. At the last place they went to, which they closed up, they took a taxi, Liggett gave his home address, and it was as easy as that. When Gloria heard the address she guessed it was no love nest she was going to, and when she saw the apartment she knew it wasn't.

Chapter 5

On Monday afternoon an unidentified man jumped in front of a New Lots express in the Fourteenth Street subway station. Mr Hoover was on time for the usual meeting of his Cabinet. Robert McDermott, a student at Fordham University, was complimented for his talk on the Blessed Virgin at the morning exercises in Her honour. A woman named Plotkin, living in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, decided to leave her husband for good and all. William K. Fenstermacher, the East 149th Street repair man, went all the way to Tremont Avenue to fix a radio for a Mrs Jones, but there was no Jones at the address given, so he had to go all the way back to the shop, wasting over an hour and a half. Babe Ruth hit a home run into the bleachers near the right field foul line. Grayce Johnson tried to get a job in the chorus of The Band Wagon, a new revue, but was told the show was already in rehearsal. Patrolman John J. Barry, Shield No. 17858, was still on sick call as a result of being kicked in the groin by a young woman Communist in the Union Square demonstration of the preceding Friday. Jerry, a drunk, did not wake up once during the entire

'Did you see that thing they had in the *New Yorker* I think it was the week before last?'

Listening, Gloria and Liggett found themselves holding hands. On her part a tenderness had come over her; at first because she felt responsible for Liggett, and then because she liked him; he was better than these other people. 'When the others come we can leave, if you want to,' she said.

'Good. Perfect,' said Liggett. 'Will it be all right with --'

'She won't mind. She just hates to be alone. Two people more or less won't make any difference.'

'Good. We'll go some place and dance. I haven't done any volunteer dancing for a long time. That's a compliment, I hope you appreciate it. I haven't done any volunteer dancing since I don't know when. Of course I dance the Turkey Trot. You do the Turkey Trot, of course?'

'Mm-hmm. And the Bunny Hug. And the Maxixe. And the Can-Can. By the way, what was the Can-Can? Was it worth all the excitement they made about it, or that I suppose they made about it?'

'Listen, beautiful Miss Wandrous, I am *not* old enough to remember the Can-Can. The Can-Can was popular around the turn of the century, and I wasn't. I wasn't at all popular at the turn of the century.'

'I can hardly believe that. At least I can hardly believe my ears now, hearing you admit that you weren't popular any time in your life.'

'There have been lots of times when I wasn't popular, and I'm beginning to think this is one of those times.'

They went to a lot of speakeasies, especially to the then new kind, as it was the beginning of the elaborate era. From serving furtive drinks of bad liquor disguised as demi-tasse the speakeasy had progressed to whole town houses, with uniformed pages and cigarette girls, a string orchestra and a four- or five-piece Negro band for dancing, free *hors d'œuvres*, four and five bartenders, silver-plated keys and other souvenir-admittance tokens to regular patrons, expensive entertainment, Cordon Bleu chefs, engraved announcements in pretty good taste, intricate accounting systems and business machinery - all a very good and, because of the competition, necessary front for the picturesque and deadly business

It had been such a good week-end; quiet and peaceful. Saturday was warm, Sunday morning was warm and in the afternoon it turned cool and made Emily think of the coat. It was time, really, to put it away, and she made a note of it as the first thing to do Tuesday morning. This year she would insure it for \$3,000, half what it cost in 1928. She would insure it and hope something would happen to it so that she could get the money out of it. There were things she could do with \$3,000, and she was getting tired of having a mink coat. She never had been happy with the actual possession of it. Something about the New England conscience; when you added up the maximum number of times you wore the coat in a season, multiplied that by three for three seasons, and divided that into \$6,000 you got the cost of the coat each time you had worn it. And it was too much. It was a fair calculation, because she knew she could not get \$3,000 for the coat now in any other way than insurance. As for getting \$6,000 on it - ~~nothing~~ Well, it had been a good week-end.

She opened the closet door, and the closet might as well have been empty. The coat was not there. She called the cook and the maid and questioned them, but her questioning and her own and their search did not result in finding the coat. Her questioning did not bring about any of the disclosures which the maid was pondering - the inference the maid had taken from some little things she had noticed about Mr Liggett's behavior and bath.

Emily telephoned Liggett, but he was not in the office and his secretary did not expect him back. Emily was going to the two clubs and a speakeasy or two, because she thought the loss of the coat ought to be reported immediately. But she was to wait and talk to Weston before notifying the police. When Weston came home she told him about the coat. He was very much surprised and was twice frightened, because he did not know it was missing until when he learned it had disappeared he was very much surprised. He told Emily it was best not to report it until she was sure that were immediately reported. He said it was a bad thing to have 'All the insurance companies keep a sort of exchange list of companies know about it in the

afternoon, which he spent in a chair at a west 49th Street speakeasy. Identical twins were delivered to a Mrs Laehase at the Lying In Hospital. A Studebaker sedan bumped the spare tyre of a Ford coupé at Broadway and Canal Street, and the man driving the Ford punched the Studebaker driver in the mouth. Both men were arrested. Joseph H. Dilwyn, forty-two years old, had all his teeth out by the same dentist he had gone to for twelve years. A woman who shall be nameless took the money her husband had given her to pay the electric light bill and bought one of the new Eugenic hats with it. Harry W. Blossom, visiting New York for the first time since the War, fell asleep in the Strand Theatre and missed half the picture. At 3.16 p.m. Mr Francis F. Tearney, conductor on a Jackson Heights No 15 Fifth Avenue bus, tipped his cap at St Patrick's Cathedral. James J. Walker, mayor of the City of New York, had a late lunch at the Hardware Club. A girl using an old curling iron caused a short circuit in the Pan-Hellenic Club. An unidentified man jumped in front of a Bronx Park express in the Mott Avenue subway station. After trying for three days Miss Helen Tate, a typist employed by the New York Life, was able to recall the name of a young man she had met two summers before at a party in Red Bank, N.J. Mr and Mrs Harvey L. Fox celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary with a luncheon in the Hotel Bossert, Brooklyn. Al Astor, an actor at liberty, woke up thinking it was Tuesday. John Lee, a coloured boy, pulled the wings out of a fly in Public School 108. The Caswell Realty Company sold a row of taxpayers in Lexington Avenue to Jack W. Levine for a sum in the neighbourhood of \$125,000. Gloria Wandrous, after taking a warm bath at home, went to sleep while worrying over what she should do about Mrs Liggett's mink coat. Eddie Brunner spent the afternoon at Norma Day's apartment playing the phonograph, especially 'The Wind in the Willows' and the Rudy Vallée record.

Monday afternoon Emily Liggett and her daughters came home by train. They got out of their taxi, carrying their coats and leaving the few bags for the doorman to see to. Emily went straight to her room and of all the things that happened to all the people in New York that day, none was more shocking to any individual than Emily's discovery that her mink coat was not in her closet.

and that had gone, and since then there had been nothing but the habit of marriage - he really loved Gloria.

And then he remembered that he did not love Gloria. He could not love a common thief. She *was* a common thief, too. You could see that in her face. There was something in her face, some unconventional thing along with the rest of her beauty, her mouth and eyes and nose - somewhere around the eyes, perhaps, or was it the mouth? - she did not have the conventional look. Emily, yes. Emily had it. He could look at Emily dispassionately, impersonally, as though he did not know her - objectively? wasn't it called? He could look at her and see how much she looked like dozens of girls who had been born and brought up as she had been. You saw them at the theatre, at the best cabarets and speakeasies, at the good clubs on Long Island - and then you saw the same girls, the same women, dressed the same, differing only in the accent of their speech, at clubs in other cities, at horse shows and football games and dances, at Junior League conventions. Emily, he decided after eighteen years of marriage, was a type. And he knew why she was a type, or he knew the thing that made the difference in the look of a girl like Emily and the look of a girl like Gloria. Gloria led a certain kind of life, a sordid life; drinking and sleeping with men and God knows what all, and she had seen more of 'life' than Emily ever possibly would see. Whereas Emily had been brought up a certain way, always accustomed to money and the good ways of spending it. In other words, all her life Emily had been looking at nice things, nice houses, cars, pictures, grounds, clothes, people. Things that were easy to look at, and people that were easy to look at; with healthy complexions and good teeth, people who had had pasteurized milk to drink and proper food all their lives from the time they were infants; people who lived in houses that were kept clean, and painted when paint was needed, who took care of their cars and their furniture and their bodies, and by so doing their minds were taken care of; and they got the look that Emily and girls - women - like her had. Whereas Gloria - well, take for instance the people she was with the night he saw her two nights ago, the first night he went out with her. The man that liked to eat, for instance. Where did he come from? He might have come from the Ghetto. Liggett happened to know that there were places in the slums where eighty families would use the same outside

the companies. It makes you a bad risk to lose a thing like that, and when you're a bad risk it's sometimes impossible to get insurance, and the least you get out of it is you have to pay a much higher premium, not only on, for instance, the coat, if they get it back, but also anything else you decide to insure.' Liggett did not believe all this - in fact knew some of it to be inaccurate; but it covered up his confusion. That that girl, that swell kid, could be the same girl he had slept with last night, for whom he was feeling something he never had felt before, and all the time she was a common ordinary little thing - it was beyond him. It was more than beyond him. The more he thought of it the angrier he got, until he wanted to take her by the throat. He told Emily he would have a private detective agency look for the coat before reporting to the insurance company or the police. This was not the way Emily would have done it, and she said so. Why go to the expense of a private detective agency when the insurance company assumed that and would be glad to assume it rather than risk the loss of \$3,000 for the coat? No, no, he insisted. Hadn't she been listening to him? Didn't she pay any attention? Hadn't he just finished telling her that the insurance company kept blacklists, and the chances were the disappearance of the coat would have some simple explanation. The detective agency wouldn't charge much - ten dollars, probably. And he would save that much in premiums by not reporting the loss to the insurance company. 'Now please let me handle this,' he told Emily. Well, it seemed pretty irregular to her, and she didn't like it. What if the private detectives didn't find the coat? Wouldn't the insurance company be very annoyed when he did finally report the theft of the coat? Wouldn't they ask why he hadn't immediately reported to the police? Wouldn't it be better in the long run to do the regular thing? She thought it was always best to do the regular thing, the conventional thing. When someone dies, you get an undertaker; when something is stolen, you tell the police. Liggett almost said: 'Who are you to talk about the conventional thing? You slept with me before you married me.' He was ashamed of that, of thinking it; but he guessed he always had thought it. It was just beginning to dawn on him that he never had loved Emily. He was so flattered by what she felt for him before they were married that he had been blinded to his true feeling about her. His true feeling was passion,

inner, looking at his wife, his two daughters, seeing in their faces the thing he had been thinking about a proper upbringing and looking at nice things and what it does to your face. He saw them and he thought of Gloria, and that anybody could meet Gloria, and Anybody, somebody she picked up in a speakeasy somewhere probably was with her now, this minute.

'I don't think I'll wait for dessert,' he said.

'Strawberries? You won't wait for strawberries?' said Emily.

'Oh, good. Strawberries,' said Ruth. 'Daddy, you'll surely wait for strawberries. If you go I'll have to eat yours and I'll get strawberry rash.'

'You won't *have* to,' said Emily.

'Gotta go. I just thought of a fellow. About the coat.'

'Can't you phone him? A detective agency, surely they'd have a phone.'

'No. Not this fellow. He isn't a private detective. He's a regular city detective, and if I phoned him he'd have to make a report on it. If I went through the regular channels. I'll get in touch with him through a friend of mine, Casey, down at Tammany Hall.'

'Well, where? Can't you phone this Casey and make an appointment?'

'Emily, *must* I explain everything in detail? I just thought of something and I want to do it now. I don't want any strawberries, or if they're that good you can put them in the icebox till I get back.'

'Well, all right. I hope this doesn't mean one of your all-night binges with your Tammany Hall friends.'

If the girls had not been there he would have given a more blistering answer than: 'I should have been a doctor.'

A taxi took him to a drug store in the Grand Central zone and he tried to get Gloria on the telephone. He tried her home, several speakeasies, and - he did not quite know why - had her page at two of the Times Square hotels. A woman he guessed was her mother said Gloria was out for dinner and the evening. It sounded so respectable, the voice and the words, that he wanted to laugh in the mouthpiece. He could not tell (and he tried whether he was now angry with Gloria for stealing Emily's coat, or because he had her, in his mind, grappling with some young sucker from Princeton. He came out of the telephone booth sweating and uncomfortable, with his hat on the back of his head. He had a Tam-

toilet. A little thing, but imagine what it must look like! Imagine having spent your formative years living like, well, somewhat the way you lived in the Army. Imagine what effect that would have on your mind. And of course a thing like that didn't only affect your mind; it showed in your face, absolutely. Not that it was so obvious in Gloria's case. She had good teeth and a good complexion and a healthy body, but there was something wrong somewhere. She had not gone to the very best schools, for instance. A little thing perhaps, but important. Her family - he didn't know anything about them; just that she lived with her mother and her mother's brother. Maybe she was a bastard. That was possible. She could be a bastard. That can happen in this country. Maybe her mother never was married. Sure, that could happen in this country. He never heard of it except among poor people, and Gloria's family were not poor. But why couldn't it happen in this country? The first time he and Emily ever stayed together they took a chance on having children, and in those days people didn't know as much about not getting caught as they do today. Gloria was even older than Ruth, so maybe her mother had done just what Emily had done, with no luck. Maybe Gloria's father was killed in a railroad accident or something, intending to marry Gloria's mother, but on the night he first stayed with her, maybe on his way home he was killed by an automobile or a hold-up man or something. It could happen. There was a fellow at New Haven that was very mysterious about his family. His mother was on the stage, and nothing was ever said about his father. Liggett wished now that he had known the fellow better. Now he couldn't remember the fellow's name, but some of the fellows in Liggett's crowd had wondered about this What's-His-Name. He drew for the *Record*. An artist. Well, bastards were always talented people. Some of the most famous people in history were bastards. Not bastards in any derogatory sense of the word, but love children. (How awful to be a love child. It'd be better to be a bastard. 'If I were a bastard I'd rather be called a bastard than a love child.') Now Gloria, she drew or painted. She was interested in art. And she certainly knew a lot of funny people. She knew that bunch of kids from New Haven, young Billy and those kids. But anybody could meet them, and anybody could meet Gloria. God damn it! That was the worst of it. Anybody could meet Gloria. He thought that all through

Harlem River branch of the New York Central to the apartments that hung over the East River, or in a one-room apartment in the Village, or an artist's studio in the West Sixties, or some place on Riverside Drive. Any apartment.

He went home late, having gone to nine speakeasies in one block, having been refused admission to two others. He went home without seeing Gloria.

*

She was spending the evening with Eddie. She went to his apartment and they had dinner at a restaurant, where Eddie ate a lot of spaghetti, winding it expertly around his fork. They had a bottle of red wine. It was a good little restaurant, with sawdust on the floor and a pool table, where some elderly Italians played a game which Eddie never understood; something to do with shooting the cueball between two tiny bowling pins. A small radio was turned on. They did not change the dial, and the programme went from music to speech to adventure story to torch-singer, with no editing on the part of the proprietor of the place. It was probably the only station that came in good, because of the 'L', which was only half a block away. Gloria and Eddie were the only Americans in the place, and no one paid any attention to them. When they wanted the waiter they had to call him from his card game with three other patrons.

'What did you do last night?' said Eddie.

'Oh, went to a movie.'

'Which one?' Eddie asked.

'The Strand.'

'What did you see?'

'Uh, Norma Shearer, in "Strangers May Kiss".'

'Oh, did you? How'd you like it? Any good?'

'Not very. I like her, though. I think she's terribly attractive.'

'She's a Canadian. From Montreal. You know, Montreal, Nova Scotia,' said Eddie.

'Montreal isn't in Nova Scotia,' said Gloria.

'I know. And "Strangers May Kiss" isn't at the Strand, in case you're interested. Of course I'm not. I don't give a damn, only I don't know why you think you have to lie to me.'

'Well, I could have got the theatre wrong.'

standing up at the fountain, and when he set the glass down on the fountain it made the hollow *cloup* sound those glasses make, but this glass must have been imperfect because it cracked and broke and he cut his finger, ever so slightly, but enough to cause an industrial crisis in the store. The pharmacist and the soda jerker were so solicitous and made him so angry with it that he was rude to them, and away went his resolution not to drink. He had been feeling so respectable and superior up to then, but the cut on his finger, which was minutely painful but enormously annoying, and the store people with their attentions got him upset. 'Jesus Christ why don't you send for a God damn ambulance,' he said, and went out in search of a drink.

Fifty-second Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues was packed solid with automobiles and their sound, never changing. The *ceep* sound of the taxis and the *aa-oo-aa* of Lincoln town cars predominated in the chorus. It was like an evening wedding in a small town; with the invited, those who had cards, inside, and the big noise going outside independent of the rest.

He went inside and had a Scotch and soda at the bar. It appeared to be full of people trying to be late for the theatre, and out-of-town men in light tan suits, drinking Old Fashioneds and laughing too loud for the humour in anything they could possibly say. Liggett did not want to talk to anyone, not even the bartenders. He drank and smoked and drank and smoked, and when his cigarette was done he ate potato chips and when his drink was done he lit another cigarette and then had more to drink. This way he waited out the people who were going to the theatre, and was alone at the bar. By that time the men in the tan suits were kissing the handsome women. Those men were getting drunk much too soon, Liggett decided, getting drunk. He realized he was drinking too much and he put it up to himself squarely, whether to go home now or get really stewed. He decided to get stewed, because he would be uncomfortable if he went home, where he never got drunk; and because if he got drunk here he might think of some crazy thing to do that might lead to his finding Gloria. Where could she be? New York's a big place, but the places Gloria went to were not many. The theatre was out; she never went to the theatre. The only other place she could be was in any apartment in town. Any other, from the houses that hung over the

'No. Not exactly.'

'Not exactly, hah? You know she said something like that, though, don't you?'

'A little like that. Oh, what the hell, Gloria, yes, she didn't put it that way. She wanted to know how I could see a good-looking girl like you and keep up a platonic friendship. I mean keep it platonic.'

'And you were peeved because you thought she was laughing at you. It didn't make you look so good to be the one man I didn't sleep with.'

'There you're wrong. If I started to resent that now it'd be pretty late in the game.'

'Did you ever resent it?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'Because I'm not attractive to you?'

'No. Not that either.'

'Well then, *what?*'

'Well, we didn't start off that way, is the only reason I can give right now. Do you want a psychological reason?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I haven't got one for you. Do you want some more wine?'

'Yes, I guess I ought to have some wine from sour grapes.'

'Oh, for God's sake,' said Eddie. 'Am I supposed to infer that you're sour grapes because I like Norma better than you?'

'Why not? Isn't that the truth?'

'No, certainly not.'

'You don't like me because you feel superior. You know all about me and that's why you never ask me to sleep with you.'

'I've asked you to sleep with me.'

'Yes. Sleep with you. Good Samaritan. When I'm tight and you think I'll get the devil if I go home drunk. You ask me if I'll sleep in your apartment. Why, that's the most insulting thing you can do, in a way. It *proves* how you feel about me. You're above my sex appeal. You could sleep with me and not feel a thing.'

'Good Lord.'

'Yes, good Lord. I'm no good. I'm not fit to touch. You'd be

'No, you couldn't. You could have got the theatre wrong, but not the picture, and "Strangers May Kiss" isn't playing on Broadway. It was, but it isn't now. So don't lie any more than you have to.'

'I'll lie to you if I want to. What I do isn't your affair anyway.'

'You won't lie to me often, because I won't be around to listen.'

'Why? Are you going away?'

'No. Where would I go? No, it's just that I won't see you. I don't want to see you if you lie to me. I know practically everything about you that there is to know, and I don't mind the kind of life you lead, because that's your business. But just don't go to all the trouble of lying to me. Save your lies for someone you have to lie to.'

'Oh -'

He laughed. 'Unless of course you want to *practise* on me. You ought to do a little more practising, by the way. If you think Norma believed that story the other night about you and your imaginary cousin and the crap game where you lost your clothes. What do you think people are? Don't you give them credit for any sense at all? You know it's a form of insult, making up a screwy story to explain something that you don't have to explain. You know, Norma's my girl, and she hasn't any wrong ideas about us.'

'Did you tell her?'

'Certainly I told her.'

'How? What did you say to her?'

'I told her we weren't having an affair.'

'Who brought it up? Did you say it first, or did she ask you? How did you happen to tell her?'

'I don't know,' said Eddie, and reflected. 'It was when I first knew her. She asked me if I was in love with anybody, and I said no, and she said what about the girl named Gloria that someone said I saw all the time. Someone told her I was seeing you, but all she knew was your first name. So I said you were a platonic friend, and that's all.'

'Is it?'

'About all. Nothing else worth repeating.'

'Didn't she say that if you and I were platonic friends, you were my only platonic friend?'

'I couldn't find Casey. I'll get in touch with him today.'

'There's some on your vest. Here, I'll get it.'

'No, it's all right. I'll do it.'

'I'll do it. You'll stain it. Let me.' She scraped off the splash of soup with a knife. 'There.'

'Thanks.'

'Let's go to the theatre tonight. I want to see Bart Marshall. And you like Zita Johann.'

'Bart Marshall? Who is he?'

'Herbert Marshall. I was being funny.'

'What are they playing in?'

'"Tomorrow and Tomorrow." By Philip Barry.'

'Oh, yes. Well, all right if you get the tickets. Who shall we ask?'

'I thought we could ask the Farleys. We'll be going to the country soon and I dislike not having seen her since last summer. What made me think of them was they were at the club Sunday, and Mrs Farley's a nice woman. I like her.'

'Yes, I saw him. He was with a fellow that said he knew me at New Haven. A Jew.'

'Oh, ho. You?' Emily laughed.

'What are you laughing at? I have nothing against Jews. I have some good friends Jews. Paul and Jimmy. You know I like them.'

'Oh, I know, but not while you were in college.'

'Listen, don't you go around saying things like that. This is no time for that kind of snobbishness. Have the Farleys by all means. Her brother is a great friend of Al Smith's. You get the tickets, and what about dressing?'

'I think a black tie.'

'Yes. Farley's always very well dressed, and if you don't specify black tie he's liable to come in tails, and I'll be damned if I want to put on tails this late in the season. Is this play any good?'

'Josie liked it.'

'What the hell does she know about anything?'

'You like Josie. I've heard you say you liked her.'

'Oh, you mean Josie Wells. I thought you meant Josie Demuth.' He wiped his mouth with the napkin lengthwise. He looked at his watch, and then had to look again to see what time it was. 'I'll be home as early as I can. I'm going to Philadelphia and I'll be

'I am, yes. He isn't. I know what he thinks. He thinks - well, just a pushover. First night I go out with him I go to bed with him. Even worse than that. He picked me up in a speakeasy.'

'Well, being picked up in a speakeasy is better than being picked up in the Grand Central station.'

'Why did you say that! Answer me! Why did you say that?'

'Hell's bells, I don't know. Did I say the wrong thing?'

'What made you say the Grand Central station? What do you know about the Grand Central station?'

'Well - it's - a station.'

'You said it was better to be picked up in a speakeasy than in Grand Central. Why did you say that? Do you know anything about my being picked up in the Grand Central?'

'No, were you?'

'Oh, God. Oh, Eddie. Take me out of here. Let's go to your apartment.'

'Sure. John! Tell John I don't want the wine. Just bring the cheque.'

They went home and she told him about Dr Reddington. She spent the night there because she was afraid, and Eddie went to sleep in a chair, watching her while pretending to read. He became exhausted by the first experience of the desire to kill a man.

*

The next morning, Tuesday, Liggett got awake with an average hangover, the kind that reminded him of mornings after football games and boat races, except that after a night's drinking like last night's he could count on partial recovery within a few minutes after answering the call of nature, and after a day of strenuous athletics nature does not always call, at least not before he was at top form. It always seemed to Liggett that too hard rowing stiffened the muscles of the intestines, resulting in constipation, which resulted in boils. Drinking had for him no such effect. A trip to the bathroom and the worse of this kind of hangover was gone. A shot of tomato juice with a generous dash of Worcestershire sauce, and a cup of black coffee and a plate of cream of tomato soup - that was his breakfast on mornings like this.

Emily came in while he was eating his soup. 'Did anything happen about the coat?'

shut about at least one small thing her husband does that disgusts her. She knew of a case where the marriage was ruined because of the husband's habit of allowing just a little of the white of egg to hang from the spoon when he ate soft-boiled eggs. In that case the disgusting thing occurred every morning. She knew of another case where the husband walked out on his wife because he said she was unclean; it took one of those psycho-analytical quacks a month to get the man to reveal that the woman never went to the bathroom without leaving toilet paper floating in the bowl of the toilet. Things like these that you kept quiet about, they were worse than the things you could quarrel about; your husband's behaviour in bed, or your wife's; his taste in clothes, or hers; cheating at games, flirtatiousness, bad manners, differences of opinion, repetitiousness, bragging and humility and punctuality and the lack of it and all the other things that people can quarrel openly about. Then there was always the hope that please God he might stop. But no; he probably did it because he thought it was expected of him.

Now this Tuesday, Nancy Farley, with nothing to do all day, began thinking of Paul's little trick early in the day. It was going to be a fine day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and no chance of any legitimate excuse not to meet Paul. This same day, this idleness gave her plenty of chance to think from time to time of John Watterson, the homely actor who everyone said had more charm than - well, everyone said he had more charm than anyone they ever knew. Watterson came of an awfully good Boston family and he had gone to Harvard, and he usually played hard-boiled parts, although he looked well in tails. He reminded some people of Lincoln; he was tall and homely like Lincoln, and Lincoln must have had a marvellous voice too. Watterson had. What with one play and another, Watterson had reached that point where he could be identified by his first name: 'Are you going to John's opening?' meant Watterson as surely as Kit and Alfred and Lynn and Helen and Oggie and Jane and Zita and Bart and Blanche and Eva and Hopie and Leslie meant the people that those names meant. Watterson certainly had arrived, and having arrived he had quietly settled down to the practice of his profession, on and off the stage.

The first thing Nancy said about him when she first laid eyes on him was that there was an honest man, which she amended to

woman, who, if she has anything at all – beauty, ugliness, charm, bad taste, good taste, sex appeal – begins with a quicker identity and holds it longer than a man does. And so they would go to parties together, or simply go home together. Every day she would meet him.

After a while it began to be a habit that to Nancy was not an unmixed blessing. At first occasionally, and then every day, Paul would come up in back of the car and gently pinch the back of Nancy's neck. In the beginning it was cute, she thought. Then she found that she was expecting it. Then she found she was setting herself against it, tightening her nerves and sitting in the very middle of the front seat, hoping he would not be able to take her by surprise. But he always did. It became a game with him, and she could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times when luck was with her and she was quicker than he. They had a phaeton then, a Packard. When they were buying a convertible one thing she had in mind was that she would be able to raise the window on her side and he would not be able to touch her neck. This was no good, though; he would get the same surprise effect by rapping hard with his ring on the raised window. Little by little the custom of meeting Paul every day became a nuisance, then almost a horror. It made her jittery, and all because he was doing something she at first thought was cute, sweet. After they would get in the car it would take her a few minutes to get her mind on what he was saying. A few times, on days when the weather was fine and he had reason to expect her to meet him, she just could not bring herself to face it – although face it was precisely not the word – and she would find excuses not to turn up. At such times he would be so hurt that she would tell herself she was a little beast; Paul was so kind and considerate and sweet in everything else, what on earth was the matter with her that she couldn't pass over such a slight fault? But this self-reproach did not have any lasting effect. It was a form of self-indulgence that certainly did not solve the problem.

As for coming right out and telling Paul she objected to his pinching the back of her neck – that was out of the question. From conversations with her friends, and from her own observations, Nancy knew that in every marriage (which after all boils down to two human beings living together) the wife has to keep her mouth

actor too. A young actor, a practically unknown juvenile. This day, thinking about Watterson, and then about the juvenile, she went back to a truth which she had discovered for herself. It was something she discovered watching the progress of the extra-marital love life of her friends – while pretending not to watch at all. The truth was that there is a certain kind of man, attractive and famous in his way and sought after by women, whom sound women, women like Nancy herself, can conceivably have an affair with, but would not marry if he were the last man on earth. Once Nancy had heard the French wisecrack: that you can walk in the Bois without buying it. (It sounded better than the American: why keep a cow when milk is so cheap?) She would use the Bois remark to justify the behaviour of some men whom she liked without liking their behaviour. Only in the past three or four years had she even attempted to apply it woman to man. Well, she would not marry a man like Watterson, but since there were men like Watterson, why not find out about them? Why not find out about at least one other man? She knew every hair on Paul's body; they knew everything about each other that they might be likely to learn. A new man would be all strange, and Nancy wondered about herself, too. Maybe she was all strange, to herself as much as to any new man. And this was a good time to find out. As coolly as that she made up her mind to have an affair with John Watterson the actor.

She was sitting down with *The Good Earth* in front of her. She put it aside the moment she made her decision, got up and went to the closet where her hats were perched on things that looked like huge wooden collar-buttons. She took two hats, tried on both of them, and went back to the closet and took out a third, which she kept on. Gloves, purse, cigarette extinguished, and she was ready to go.

The car was parked outside. She got in and drove the few blocks to the block in which Watterson lived. When she came to his house she drove right past without changing her speed. Somehow – not today. She had a hunch. 'If my foot had eased its pressure on the accelerator I'd have gone in. But it didn't, so, not today.' She went to the movies – dear George Arliss, in 'The Millionaire'. 'I suppose that's passing up an opportunity,' she said to herself, thinking of Watterson, and enjoyed it over and over again.

there is a man with honesty. He had hair like an Indian's, straight and black and it fell over his forehead – never with any attempt on his part to keep it from falling. He had big thick lips and out of them came the sounds of this hard strong voice of his in a Chicago accent which he never tried to change, except when he played the captain of an English mine-sweeper and in his one try at the films, when he played an Indian. He was used to being told he had beautiful hands. They were big, and on the little finger of each hand he wore a signet ring which had had to have more gold put in to fit his fingers. He liked women whose buttocks just fit his spread hands, and although Nancy did not quite qualify, she was still on the small side. He wanted Nancy.

She had seen him probably a dozen times offstage. This was extremely painful to him, as he was every bit as aware of the number of times he had seen her as Nancy was of the number of times she had seen him. But it had always been Mr Watterson and Mrs Farley. The last three times she had seen him he had asked her to come in some afternoon, any afternoon, when she was in the neighbourhood and had a minute. That was as far as he would go. If she came it would be with the understanding, et cetera. She knew that. And he knew as well as the next one what his reputation was, and all the women he knew also knew his reputation. 'I have no etchings,' he would say, 'but I'll bet I can get you tight.' Yes, he had honesty, and he was in the phone book.

It was Spring and Nancy had nothing to do all day until the daily ordeal with Paul, and last week she had seen Watterson and that time he had said: 'You haven't come in for a drink, Mrs Farley. What about that?'

'I haven't been thirsty.'

'Thirsty? What has thirsty got to do with it? I'm going away for the week-end, but I'll be back Tuesday and I'm in the phone book, so I think you'll need a drink: Tuesday. Or Thursday. Thirsty on Thursday. Or Wednesday. Or any other day. But beginning Tuesday.' Then he had laughed to take the curse off it a little and also to let her know that of course he didn't think for one minute she'd come.

Once in her life with Paul, Nancy had let herself go in a kiss with another man, a hard kiss, standing up, with her mouth open and her legs apart. Now that she thought of it, that had been an

every reason in the world to take it under the table. You can't
get a coat like that, that cost four or five hundred dollars
more.'

'Four of five thousand.'

'Jesus! All the more reason. My God, baby, a coat like that
at kind of money, they insure those things. The more money you
now they'll have detectives parked on our doorstep.'

'I doubt it. I imagine I could keep that coat as long as I wanted
it.'

Eddie looked at her but not long. He stood up. 'Do you want
some more coffee? There is more if you want it.'

'You don't like that, do you?'

'What difference does it make whether I like it or not? I told
you what I thought. I have no say over you.'

'You could have. Come here,' she said. She held up her hands.
He sat on the bed again. She put her arms around his head and
held him to her bosom. 'Oh, you don't know what I'd do for you,
my precious darling. You're all I have, Eddie. Eddie, you're
afraid of me. I'm no good, Eddie. I know I'm no good, but I could
be good for you, Eddie, Eddie, my darling. Oh. Here. One second,
darling. One second. My baby. My baby that needs a haircut. Ah
my - *What's that!*'

'Phone,' he said.

'Answer it. It's bad luck not to answer it.'

'I never heard that.'

'It is. Go on, darling, answer it.'

'Hello,' he said into the telephone. 'What? Yes. Speaking.'

Pause.
'Why, you son of a - ' he slammed the phone into its cradle.
'The Bush Brothers Hand Laundry. The bastards.'

'Is that the laundry you owe the money to?'

'Oh, God. Maybe it is. I forgot the name of that one. I don't
think I ever did know it. No, it couldn't be the same one. The
Bush Brothers were soliciting new work, so that's not the laundry
that has my stuff. *They* don't want any new work. I want you.'

'Do you? Here I am. Can anybody see us from those windows
over there?'

'They might. I'll get it. I'll do it.'

'I ought to get up.'

'Do you want some coffee? I made some coffee if you can stand it,' said Eddie.

'Huh?' said Gloria. 'Oh. Eddie. Hello, Eddie darling.'

'Hello, sweet. How about some coffee?'

'I'll make it. Just give me a minute to wake up.'

'You don't have to make it. It's made. All you have to do is drink it.'

'Oh, thank you.' She sat up in bed and reached with both hands for the cup and saucer. She drank some. 'Good,' she said.

'You make this?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Eddie.

He sat down easy on the bed so he would not jounce it and cause her to spill the coffee. 'Did you have a good sleep?'

'Mm. But marvellous,' she said. Then: 'What about you? Where did you sleep? My beamish boy.'

'Right here.'

'Where "right here"? ' she repeated.

'There. On the chair.'

'There, there, under the chair. Run, run, get the gun,' she said. 'No, where did you sleep, Baby?'

'The chair, I told you.'

'You couldn't. With those legs? You couldn't sleep in any chair with those legs. What did you do with your legs?'

'I didn't do anything with them. I just put my fanny deep in the chair, and my legs - I don't know. Extended. They extended in a, uh, south-westerly direction and I went to sleep and my legs went to sleep.'

'Ooh, you must feel like the wrath of God. Are you stiff?'

'No, as a matter of fact I feel fine. I was so tired when I went to sleep. I read a while after you dropped off, and I went to sleep with the light on. I woke up I guess around three or four and doused the light and got up and got an overcoat. Reminds me You know that fur coat you came here in Sunday. It's still in my closet. You better haul off and do something about it. Take it back where you got it, will you?'

She seemed to think about it.

'Will you?' he said. 'It's none of my business, Gloria, and what you do is - as I just said, it's none of my business, only I wish you'd return that coat. That's the kind of a fast one that - maybe you

'No, don't.'

'I'll have a child.'

'Don't you want a child?'

'Yes, very much. But, all right.'

He sat up again and looked away. He made his gesture of shooting a foul in basketball, but with his fists clenched. 'No,' he said.

'It's all right, Eddie,' she said. 'It's all right, darling.'

'No,' he said. 'No, it isn't. It's anything *but* all right.'

'I'm clean. You needn't worry about that, if that's what's worrying you.'

'Oh, I know. I wasn't thinking that.'

'You used to think it. Didn't you?'

'A long time ago. Before I knew you.'

'I'd never do that to you.'

'I know. I don't think that any more. That's not what I'm thinking now.'

'Don't you love me? Do you love Norma?'

'Nope.'

'Have you told her you love her?'

'Once or twice.'

'Does she love you?'

'No. I don't think so. Maybe.'

'You're not sure.'

'Oh, I'm sure. She doesn't love me. No, it hasn't anything to do with Norma. I love you.'

She touched his shoulder. 'I know. And I love you. The only one I ever did love, and the only one that ever loved me.'

'I doubt that. Aw, you're *crazy*.'

'No. I know. I know what it is even if you don't. Or maybe you do know and won't say it. It's because I've stayed with so many men that you think -'

'Don't talk. Don't say anything.'

'All right,' she said, and was silent, as was Eddie. Then she went on: 'If you didn't know I'd stayed with so many men would you love me?'

'I do love you.'

'But it would be different, wouldn't it? Of course. It's stupid of me to ask you that. But will you answer this truthfully? If you

an interesting article. Yes, I met Legs Diamond. What did you say? Who didn't? Lots of people didn't. I met him and the boy I was with didn't know him, even by reputation, and he kept making cracks. Governor Roosevelt's mother is sick and he's going to Paris where she is. She's in the hospital. Did you know that he has infantile paralysis? I never knew that till about a month or two ago. It never shows in his pictures, but he's always holding on to a state policeman's arm. Mm. As an aftermath of the. It says here as an aftermath of the airplane crash in which Knute Rockne lost his life the Fokker 29's are being given the air by the Department of Commerce. I can use Fokker in a sentence.'

'I can use identification in a sentence. I'm not going away this summer because identification till October.'

'Mine was dirty. Oh, the Pulitzer Prize. "*Alison's House*"? Now for God's sake. "*Alison's House*." And *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*. Well, I suppose that's all right. Edmund Duffy. Have you read *The Glass Key*?'

'No.'

'It's by the same man who wrote *Maltese Falcon*, but it's not nearly as good. Oh, here's one for you. Listen to this. This is old Coolidge. "Collins H. Gere, buzz buzz buzz buzz belongs to a generation of strong character and high purposes. Their passing marks the end of an era." Whose passing? Does he mean strong character and high purposes' passing? Maybe he does. Maybe he's right. Do you know anybody with strong character and high purposes?'

'You.'

'No, that's insulting. Think of someone. It has to be our generation, not older people, because Coolidge says their passing marks the end of an era, I guess he means the era that had strong character and high purposes. You, now. Let me see. Have you a strong character, darling?'

'No character.'

'I'd say yes. About the high purposes, I'm not so sure. How are you on high purposes?'

'Low.'

'No character and low purposes.'

'Not low purposes,' he said. 'I just said I was low on *high* purposes. It isn't exactly the same thing.'

'No, it isn't. Not in my present state.'

'Oh - do you really feel - '

'No, no. Not seriously.'

She got out of bed and put on his bathrobe with her arms folded in front of her and her shoulders slightly hunched. She smiled at him and he smiled back. 'I guess - I guess I never felt worse. Not sad. It isn't sadness the way I and you think of sadness and everybody else thinks of it. It's just this, that the one thing we have - nope. I won't say it.'

'Oh, you've got to finish it now.'

'Must I? Yes, I guess I must. Well, it's awful when you think that you've stayed with so many men and made such a mess of your life, and then someone you really want to stay with you because you love him, that person is the one person you mustn't stay with because if you do he immediately becomes like the rest, and you don't want him to become like the rest. The thing he has that the rest haven't is that you haven't stayed with him.'

'No, that's wrong. I don't want you to think that. It isn't true. Maybe it is, but I don't think so.'

'No, I guess not, but - I don't know. The hell with it. You go on out for a walk. Ten minutes, and when you get back I'll be dressed.'

'I'll buy a coffee ring.'

She stood at the bathroom door, watching him put on his coat. 'I'm a real bitch, Eddie. Do you know why?'

'Why?'

'Because I know what's right, but I'm so strongly tempted. You've never seen me without any clothes on, have you?'

'I'll get the coffee ring.'

'That's right,' she said.

When he did not return in fifteen minutes she began to worry, but he did return in ten minutes more, and they had more breakfast. He brought also a container of orange juice for her and a morning paper. 'Mm. Legs Diamond's arrested,' she said. 'I met him once.'

'Who didn't?' said Eddie. 'What did they arrest him for? Parking near a fire plug, I'll bet.'

'No. The Sullivan Law. That's uh, buzz buzz buzz buzz. Weapons. Deadly weapons in his possession. By Joel Sayre. This is

west. There were others who were not famous, but were prominent in Harrisburg, Denver, Albany, Nashville, St Paul-Minneapolis, Atlanta, Houston, Portland, Me., Dayton, and Hartford. Among these was Mrs Dunbar Vicks, of Cleveland, in town on one of her three or four visits a year to see a friend's private collection of dirty movies and to go to bed with a young man who formerly worked for Finchley. Mrs Vicks was standing at the bar, with her back to Walter R. Loskind, the Hollywood supervisor, who was talking to Percy Luffberry, the director. Percy owed a great deal to Walter. When Percy was directing 'War of Wars' he had small charges of explosive buried here and there in the ground, not enough to hurt anyone, but enough so that when the charge was set off the extras in German uniforms would be lifted off the ground. The extras had been warned about that and were being paid a bonus for this realism. It went all right until Percy decided he wanted to have one extra crawling along the ground instead of walking. When the charge was set off the extra lost both eyes, and if Walter hadn't stood by Percy, Percy would have been in a hell of a fix. Seated directly across the room was Mrs Noel Lincoln, wife of the famous sportsman-financier, who had had four miscarriages before she found out (or before her doctor dared tell her) that a bit of bad luck on the part of her husband was responsible for these misfortunes. Mrs Lincoln was sitting with pretty little Alicia Lincoln, her niece by marriage, who was the source of cocaine supply for a very intimate group of her friends in society, the theatre, and the arts. Alicia was waiting for a boy named Gerald, whom she took to places where girls could not go unescorted. Bruce Wix, the artists' representative, came in and tried to get the eye of Walter R. Loskind, but Walter did not look. Bruce stood alone at the bar. Henry White, the writer, was told he was wanted on the telephone - the first move, although he did not know it, in the house technique of getting rid of a drunk. On the way out he bowed to Dr (p.d.s.) Jack Fry, who was arriving with one of his beautiful companions. It was afternoon, so the companion was not wearing the Fry pearls, which Dr Fry always loaned to show girls and actresses while they were out with him. Mr and Mrs Whitney Hofman, of Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, arrived at this time, wishing they had been better friends so they could find something to talk about without self-consciousness. They

'No, you're right. Well, I can't think of anyone I like that has strong character and high purposes. The Giants beat Brooklyn, if you're interested. Six to three was the score. Terry tripled, scoring when the Giants worked their squeeze play, Vergcz laid down a perfect bunt. That shouldn't sound dirty, but when you have a mind like mine. I must look at Bethlehem Steel. My uncle has some of that. Closed at 44½. That's enough of that. Oh, here is sad news. Clayton, Jackson and Durante are splitting up. Schnozzle is going to Hollywood and they're breaking up. Oh, that's sad. That's the world's worst. Why did you have to show me this paper? No more wood number? No more hats? No more telegrams like the one he sent: "Opening at Les Ambassadeurs as soon as I learn how to pronounce it." Ah. That makes me sad, really sad. I hope he divides his salary with the others. Do you like this hat? On the right hand page. . . . On me.'

'No. It hides the eyes.'

'All right. I must go home to the bosom of my family. A flat chest if I ever saw one. Shall I call you tomorrow?'

'Yes. Oh, how about that fur coat?'

'I don't know. I'll call you tomorrow.'

'Well, aren't you going to give it back to this fellow?'

'Well, I can't just take the coat to him, can I?'

'I don't see why not,' said Eddie. 'If you want to return the coat, you can. The way you do it is up to you.'

'All right, I will then, if it'll make you feel any better. I'll call him up right now.' She telephoned Liggett. 'He's out of town, his office said.'

'Well, phone him tomorrow.'

She went home and there was a telegram there from Liggett, asking her to meet him at their favourite speakeasy at four. They had told her at his office that he was out of town, but her life was full of inconsistencies like that.

She was there before four, and took a small table by herself and watched the world come in. That afternoon the speakeasy was visited by a fairly representative crowd. On their lips soon would be her name, with varying opinions as to her character. Most of these people were famous in a way, although in most cases their fame did not extend more than twenty blocks to the north, forty blocks to the south, seven blocks to the east and four blocks to the

The bartender simply entered it against Billy's account - Billy was supposed to be a little screwy from knocks on the head. Kitty Meredith, the movie actress, came in with her adopted son, four years old, and everybody said how cute he was, what poise, as he took a sip of her drink.

'I'm sorry I'm late,' said Liggett.

Gloria looked up. 'It's all right,' she said. 'In five more minutes I'd have gone, or at least I wouldn't have been alone.'

'Who? That one that's looking at you now?'

'I won't tell you,' she said.

'Uh, what are you drinking?'

'Ale.'

'One ale, and a brandy and soda.'

'Well, what's it all about?' said Gloria. 'I went home and your telegram was there. I phoned you at your office, but they said you'd gone away.'

'Where were you last night?'

'Oh, no. Not in that tone. Who do you think you are?'

'All right, I'm sorry.' He went through the business of getting a cigarette lit, then he remembered and offered her one. That doubled the delay before he said: 'If what I want to ask you makes you very angry will you try not to hold it against me? First of all - please let me talk - first of all, I think you know I'm crazy about you. You know that, don't you?'

No answer.

He repeated: 'You know that, don't you?'

'You said not to interrupt.'

'Well, you do know that, don't you?'

'I'm not so sure. Crazy about me doesn't mean anything.'

'Well, I am. In the worst way. Don't make a joke about it. I am crazy about you. I can't think of anything but you. I can't make sense for thinking about how long it's going to be before I see you again. When I don't know where you are, like last night I was here and all over, trying to find you.' He saw she was not paying much attention.

'You're right,' he went on. 'That's not what I want to talk about. At least not now. Or I mean I want to talk about it now, but there is another matter.'

'That's what I thought.'

were joined by Whitney's cousin Scott Hofman, a cross-eyed fellow who at the age of thirty did not have to shave more than once a week. Mike Romanoff came in, looked around the room, and went out again. A party of six young people, Mr and Mrs Mortimer House, Mr and Mrs Jack Whitehall, and Miss Sylvia House and Mr Irving Ruskin, were told at the door that they could not come in because they had not made reservations. They had to make way for a Latin-American diplomat whose appointment to Washington showed what his country thought of this. He had had malaria *before* he caught *siflis*, which is the wrong order for an automatic cure. Inside again, banging on his table for a waiter, sat Ludovici, the artist, who had several unretouched nude photographs of Gloria which she wished she had back. He was with June Blake, show girl and model, who after four days was still cheerful over winning nearly a thousand dollars on Twenty Grand. The bet had not been made through a bookmaker, and involved no cash outlay on her part. It was a slightly intricate arrangement between herself and Archie Jelliffe, the axle man, who told June he would place the bet for her if she would agree to bring to his country place a certain virgin he wanted to know better. Was it June's fault that the former virgin was at this minute in a private hospital? Robert Emerson, the magazine publisher, came in with his vice-president, Jerry Watlington. Emerson was trying to make life pleasant for Watlington, who had just been blackballed at a good club which Emerson belonged to. Emerson sincerely regretted the blackball, now that he had put it in. Mad Horace H. Tuttle, who had been kicked out of two famous prep schools for incendiarism, was there with Mrs Denis Johnstone Humphries (whose three names seldom were spelled right), of Sewickley Heights, near Pittsburgh. Mrs Humphries was telling Horace how she had to drive around in a station wagon because strikers stoned her Rolls. The worst of it was she was riding in the Rolls at the time, personally holding her entry for the Flower Show, and when the stones began to beat against the car she had presence of mind enough to lie on the floor, but forgot about the roses and crushed them. Her story was not interrupted when Horace nodded to Billy Jones, the gentleman jockey, who walked quickly to the bar with two dollars in his hand, had a quick double-whiskey-soda, and walked out, with the two dollars in his hand.

'What made you stop all of a sudden? You were going great.'

'Was I?'

'I'll say.'

'I just discovered something, or almost did. Wondering whether anyone was happily married. I wondered if I was, and then I wondered if I wasn't. God, I'm in a worse spot than anyone. I don't even know if I'm unhappily married. I don't know anything about myself. I must be happy, because whenever I've looked back and remembered times when I was happy, I always find that I didn't know I was happy when I was. Well, if I'm happy now it's because of you. Let me rave. I'm thinking out loud.'

'A little too loud for the taxi driver, or else maybe not loud enough.'

'Well, that's all he's going to hear. This is the end of the line.'

This time they were not greeted by the voluble bartender, but by a tall sad man who looked as though he ought to be a Texas Ranger. They went to the small room off the bar where there were booths, and when the bartender brought their drinks Liggett began: 'I didn't feel like talking about this in the taxi. Now I have to talk and get it over with. Gloria, did you take a fur coat out of my apartment Sunday?'

Silence.

'Did you? Are you not answering because you're angry, or what?'

'What do you think?'

'I'm asking you.'

'Yes, I took it.'

'Well - will you give it back? It's my wife's coat, and I've had a hard time keeping her from telling the police.'

'Why don't you let her tell the police?'

'Do you really want the coat that much?'

'I could have it, couldn't I?'

'Yes. You could, but not very easily. Uh, naturally, it would break up my home. The first thing the detectives would do would be to question the employees of the apartment house, and the elevator operator would remember your leaving with the coat on Sunday. Then they'd tell my wife there was a girl in the apartment Saturday night, and while my wife might possibly suspect my being unfaithful, for the sake of the children I don't think

'That's what you thought. Well - Jesus, I wish we were some place else. Drink your drink and we'll get out of here. What I want to say I don't want to say in this madhouse, all these people yelling their heads off.'

She gulped some beer and left some in the glass. 'That's all I want.'

He left two dollar bills and a quarter on the table and they went out. He refused the taxi at the door, but walked down the block towards Fifth Avenue and took a taxi that was moving. 'Fortieth Street and Seventh Avenue,' he told the driver.

'Where are we going?'

'That place you took me to the other night. The newspaper place.' He took off his hat and held it on his knee. 'You know Gloria, I'm in a bad way about you. The thing that's happened to me usually happens to men I know who have been good husbands. I don't mean that I've been an especially bad husband. I've been good to my wife in most ways. I've always kept things from her that would hurt her -'

'You're the kind of man that would have a mistress and insult her in front of your wife because you thought that would mislead her.'

'You're wrong. No, you're right. The only time I had a mistress that my wife knew I did say disparaging things about her, the mistress. How do you know these things? You're not more than I'd say twenty-two. How do you know these things?'

'How do I know them? What else has there been in my life but finding out things like that? But go on, tell me about what happens to men of your age.'

'What happens to men of my age. What happens to men of my age is this, if they've been good husbands. They go along being good husbands, working hard and having a good time playing golf, making a little money, going to parties with the same crowd and then sometimes it's a woman they've known all their lives and sometimes it's a filing clerk in the office, and sometimes it's a singer in a night club. I know of one case where it was a man and his sister. Not that they ever did anything about it, except that the man committed suicide, that's all. He'd been happily married - oh, what the hell am I talking about, happily married. Is anybody happily married? I often wonder whether anybody is.' He stopped talking.

with this, and you will too. Sit down.' He reached for her hand, but she ran out to the bar room.

'Let me out of here,' she said to the bartender.

'Don't open that door,' said Liggett.

'Out of the way, mister,' said the bartender.

'What is it, Joe?' said a man at the bar, who Liggett saw was in uniform. The man turned, and it was a patrolman's uniform. The cop put on his cap and came over.

'Don't hurt him. Just let me out,' said Gloria.

'Is he molesting you, lady?' said the cop.

'I just want to get out,' said Gloria.

'Listen, officer -'

'Out of the way, wise guy,' said the cop, and in some manner which Liggett did not understand the cop put his hand inside Liggett's coat and held him by the vest high up. He could not move. They let Gloria out and the cop still held Liggett.

'Wuddle we do with him, Joe?' said the cop. 'You know him?'

'I never seen him before. Who are you, anyway?'

'I can identify myself.'

'Well, identify yourself,' said the cop.

'If you let me, I will,' said Liggett.

'Stand in back of him, Joe, just in case.'

'Oh, I won't do anything.'

'Huh, you're telling me. You picked the wrong spot to try anything, fellow, didn't he, Joe?'

'Just leave him try something, he'll find out.'

'I happen to be a very good friend of Pat Casey, if you're interested,' said Liggett.

'A friend of Pat Casey's,' said the cop. 'He says he's a friend of Pat Casey's, Joe.'

'Wuddia know about that,' said Joe.

Whereupon the cop slapped Liggett back and forth on the face with the palm and the back of his hand. 'A friend . . . of Pat . . . Casey. Don't give me that, you son of a bitch. I don't care if you're a friend of the Pope of Rome, any . . . son . . . of a bitch . . . that tries to . . . sneer me . . . with who he knows. Now get outa here. Pat Casey!'

'Go on. Get out,' said Joe.

she'd forgive my bringing anyone into her home. It's her home, you know, even more than it is mine, or as much. Well, so that would break up the home, but that wouldn't be all. When the police are notified in a thing like that they like to make an arrest, so they'd probably find out who you were.'

'From you?'

'No. Not from me. They could arrest me, I suppose, but I wouldn't tell them who it was. But from - did you take a taxi? You must have. Well, they'd find out where you went, and so on. They have ways of finding out, without any help from me. So you wouldn't have the coat long. And what if my wife told the insurance people? That would fix me in a business way. Not that there's much left to be fixed, but at least I have a good job. Well, if my wife became vindictive and told the insurance people to, uh, proceed just as though I were a stranger they would arrest me for compounding a felony or accessory before the fact or something like that, and the tabloids would get hold of it. No, you can't win.'

'Crime does not pay, eh?'

'I don't know whether it does or not, but I do know this, you won't gain anything by keeping the coat.'

'Except the coat.'

'Not even the coat. They'll take it away from you. Oh, come on, don't be unreasonable. I'll buy you a coat just like it.'

'It's an expensive coat.'

'It's insured for I think four thousand dollars. That's quite an item for an insurance company to have to make good on. What are you doing, having fun?'

'A little. You had fun with me Saturday night. Big stuff, tearing my dress and all that old cave-man act.'

'I'm sorry about that. I've told you before I was sorry.'

'It didn't sound very convincing before, but now that you're in a jam -'

'Listen, God damn it -'

'Don't swear at me. I'm going.'

'Oh, no, you're not.'

'Oh, yes, I *am*, and don't you try to stop me, if you know what's good for you.'

'Listen, you little bitch, I'll go to jail before I let you get away

anywhere with you.' She tried to stop him but not very hard. It wasn't much use trying and the streets were full of people; little people coming up from the fur centre to pile into the southernmost entrance to the Times Square subway station. She saw Liggett get into another cab.

'Will I folly him?' said her driver.

'Yes, will you please?' she said.

Her taxi followed his to within a block of his home. She stopped and watched him get out, saw the doorman at his apartment pay the cab driver. 'Go to the Horatio Street number,' she said.

Eddie did not answer his bell, though she rang for five minutes. She left a note for him and went home.

Chapter 6

You could still read a newspaper in the street when Nancy and Paul Farley arrived at the Liggetts'. Nancy was wearing a printed chiffon frock, Farley was wearing a dinner jacket with shawl collar, a soft shirt, a cummerbund instead of a waistcoat, and pumps. The pumps were old and a little cracked, and in his hand he had a grey felt hat that certainly did not look new. Emily wondered where she had got the idea Farley would be dressed like something out of the theatre programmes. Where? From Weston, of course. Where, where was Weston? What had happened in Philadelphia?

'Good evening, Mrs Farley, Mr Farley. Let's go in here, I think it's cooler.'

'It is cool, isn't it?' said Nancy.

'Bobbie did this building,' said Paul.

'A friend of ours,' Nancy explained. 'Robert Scott. The architect. Do you know him, by any chance?'

'No, I don't believe I do,' said Emily. 'All right, Mary. The cocktail things. Mr Farley, do you mind if I pass that job on to you? My husband hasn't arrived! He went to Philadelphia this morning and I expected him home at four, but I could have been mistaken. Perhaps he meant the four o'clock train, which ~~was~~

Liggett could hardly see. There were tears in his eyes from the cop's slaps on his nose. 'Like hell I will,' he said, ready to fight. The cop reached out and pushed him hard and quick, and he went down on his back. Joe, who had been standing in back of him, had knelt down back of his legs and all the cop had to do was push and down he went. He fell outside the speakeasy on the stair landing, and the two men began kicking him and kicked him until he crawled away and went down the stairs.

He had no hat, he could hardly see, his clothes were a mess of dirt and phlegmy spit that he had picked up on the floor, he was badly shaken by hitting his coccyx when the cop pushed him, his nose was bleeding, his body was full of sharp pains where they had kicked him.

To be deprived of the right to fight back when you have nothing left to lose is awful, and that made Liggett feel weak. They had beaten him in a few minutes worse than he ever had been beaten before, and he knew he could have gone on fighting now till they killed him, but they would not give him the chance, the bastards. Outside the world was disinterested or perhaps even friendly, but there was no fighting outside. It was inside, upstairs, where there was fighting, and he wanted to go back and fight those two; no rules, but kick and punch and swing and butt and bite. The only thing was, he was facing the street now, and it was too damn much trouble to turn around, and inside of him he knew he did not have the strength to climb the stairs. If he could be transported up the stairs and inside he could fight, but the stairs were too much. He heard the door upstairs being opened, then closing as his hat landed at his feet. He reached down painfully and picked it up and put it on his aching head, and walked out to the street. He stumbled along into a taxi. The driver didn't want him to get in, but was afraid to take a chance on crossing him. Then as the driver said: 'Where to?' Gloria opened the door of the cab.

'It's all right, I know him,' she said.

'Okay, Miss Wandrous,' said the driver.

'Out. Get out. Get outa my tax'cab,' said Liggett.

'Go to 274 Horatio Street,' Gloria told the driver.

'Okay,' said the driver, and reached back to close the door, which had clicked only once.

Liggett got up and opened the door, mumbling: 'I'm not going

told me a Martini ought to be shaken very hard, briskly, a few vigorous shakes up and down, so that the gin and vermouth would be cracked into a proper *foamy* mixture. He said Americans, especially in these dark ages – I mean Prohibition, not the depression. We have a tendency to drink a cocktail in two gulps, for the effect, whereas if you shake the cocktail the various ingredients go into solution more completely, and the result is a foamy drink – not very noticeably foamy, but more foamy than not – and you have a cocktail that you can sip, almost like champagne.'

'Oh, I never heard that,' said Emily. 'It does sound like a plausible theory, as you say.'

'You see, our cocktails, stirred, are syrupy and very strong. Two Martinis out of a stirred batch have much more effect than two shaken ones. Stirred cocktails are little more than straight gin and vermouth. So we've followed his advice and I must say I think he's right.'

'Let's do it that way, then. I'll get the other shaker. This one has only the stirring kind of top.'

'Oh, no, not if it means –'

'Not at all,' said Emily. 'I want to try your way.' She went to the dining-room and came back with a shaker.

'I noticed you have new cocktail shakers too,' said Nancy. 'You know, we have newer cocktail shakers and things like that than a cousin of Paul's. She was married five years ago, and by actual count she was given twenty-two cocktail shakers for wedding presents. All sorts. And those she kept look positively obsolete compared with ours. Ours are all new, within the last two years.'

'When Weston and I were married no one would have thought of giving a cocktail shaker.'

'We didn't get a single one,' said Nancy.

'There,' said Paul. 'I hope you like this after all my build-up, Mrs Liggett.'

She tasted her cocktail. 'Oh, yes, by all means. Oh, even I can see the difference right away.'

'Isn't it a lot better?' said Nancy.

'Yes. Weston will like it too, I know. His favourite drink is whiskey and soda. He'd almost rather not drink cocktails for that reason, that they're too syrupy. This ought to be the solution of the cocktail problem for him. Speaking of Weston, I think we'll

'Good Lord,' said Paul.

Nancy sucked in her breath.

'What in God's name happened, darling?' said Emily, going to him.

'I'll take this arm', said Paul to the doorman.

'Please let me walk by myself,' said Liggett, and shook off his helpers. 'I'm terribly sorry, Mrs Farley, but you'll have to excuse me tonight.'

'Oh, well, of course,' said Nancy.

'Can't I give you a hand, old man?' said Paul.

'No, thanks,' said Liggett. 'Emily - will you - I think Mrs Farley, Mr Farley.'

'Let me help you to your room,' said Farley. 'I think I ought to do this, Mrs Liggett.'

'I'd rather you didn't, Farley. Thanks just the same, but I'd really rather you didn't,' said Liggett. 'Apologize to you, Emily, before the Farleys.'

'Oh, they understand I'm sure,' said Emily. 'Mrs Farley, Mr Farley, you will excuse us I know?'

'Of course,' said Farley. 'If you want me to do anything?'

'No, thank you. I'll manage. I'm sorry.'

'Come on, darling,' said Nancy. 'Anything at all, Mrs Liggett. Please call us.'

'Thank you both,' said Emily.

The Farleys left. Nancy could hardly wait till they got inside a taxi where only Paul could see her crying. 'Oh, what a terrible thing. What an awful sight.' She put her arms around Paul and wept. 'That poor unhappy woman. To have that happen to her. Ugh. Disgusting beast. No wonder, no wonder she has such sad eyes.'

'Yes, and the son of a bitch was no more in Philadelphia than I was. I saw him getting tanked up at the Yale Club at lunch time. He didn't see me, but I saw him.' He waited. 'But it's nothing for you to be upset about, darling. They aren't even close friends of ours.'

'I'll stop,' said Nancy.

'We'll go to Longchamps.'

'No, let's go where we can drink,' said Nancy.

wait five more minutes and if he hasn't arrived we'll begin without him. He's usually so punctual about meals, and I know he was especially anxious to be on time for the Farleys. I hate being late for the theatre, so we'll give him five more minutes. I'm so glad you hadn't seen "Tomorrow and Tomorrow". Herbert Marshall has *such* charm, don't you think so, Mrs Farley?"

'Just about the most charming man I know. Not that I know him. I did meet him.'

'I don't see how he gets around with that leg of his,' said Paul.

'I can't even tell which one it is, and I watch every time,' said Nancy.

'He lost it in the war, didn't he?' said Emily.

'I believe so,' said Nancy.

'Yes, he did. He was in the British Army,' said Paul.

'Not in the Austrian Army, dear?' said Nancy.

Everyone laughed politely. 'As a matter of fact he was in the Austrian Army,' said Paul. 'He was a spy.'

'No, no. That's not getting out of it,' said Nancy. 'Besides, that's not original. Who was it said that first? You read it in the *New Yorker*.'

'What was that?' asked Emily.

'Oh, you must have seen it. I think it was in the Talk of the Town column. George S. Kaufman, you know, he wrote "Once In a Lifetime" and a hundred other plays.'

'Yes,' said Emily.

'Well, he and some of the Algonquin literati were together one night and there was a stranger in their midst who kept bragging about his ancestry, and finally Kaufman, who is a Jew, spoke up and said: "I had an ancestor a Crusader." The stranger looked askance and Kaufman went on: "Yes, his name was Sir Reginald Kaufman. He was a spy."'

'All right, except that it was Sir Roderick Kaufman,' said Nancy.

Emily laughed. In one more minute she would have taken her guests in to dinner, but before the minute was up the doorbell rang and then the door was opened and Liggett came in, supported by the elevator operator and the doorman, who Emily noticed first was trying to take off his cap.

'Oh, God,' said Emily.

'Well, I'll tell you. A man I know slightly, he was one of the smartest traders in Wall Street. You wouldn't know his name, because I don't think I ever had occasion to mention it except perhaps to your mother and it wouldn't have interested you. He was a *real* plunger, that fellow. The stories they told downtown about this man, they were sensational. A Jew, naturally. Why, say, that fellow *couldn't* lose. *And*, he was shrewd, the way all Jews are. Well, as I say, he's always been a pretty smart trader. They say he was the only one that called the turn in 1929. He got out of the market in August 1929, at the peak. Everybody told him why, you're crazy, they all said. Passing up millions. Millions, they told him. Sure, he said. Well, I'm willing to pass them up and keep what I have, he told them, and of course they all laughed when he told them he was going to retire and sit back and watch the ticker from a café in Paris. Retire and only thirty-eight years of age? Huh. They never heard such talk, the wisenheimers downtown. Him retire? No. It was in his blood, they said. He'd be back. He'd go to France and make a little whoopee, but he'd be back and in the market just as deeply as ever. But he fooled them. He went to France, all right, and I suppose he made whoopee because I happen to know he has quite a reputation that way. And they were right saying he'd be back, but not the way they thought. He came back first week in November, two years ago, right after the crash. Know what he did? He bought a Rolls Royce Phantom that originally cost over eighteen thousand dollars, he bought that for a thousand-dollar bill. He bought a big place out on Long Island. I don't know exactly what he paid for it, but one fellow told me he got it for not a cent more than the owner paid for one of those big indoor tennis courts they have out there. For that he got the whole estate, the land, the house proper, stables, garages, everything. Yacht landing. Oh, almost forgot. A hundred and eighty-foot yacht for eighteen thousand dollars. That figure I do know because I remember hearing he said a hundred dollars a foot was enough for any yacht. And mind you, the estate was with all the furniture. And all because he got out in time and had the cash. Everything he had was cash. Wouldn't lend a cent. Not one red cent, for any kind of interest. Not even a hundred per cent interest. Just wasn't interested, he said. Buy, yes. He bought cars, houses, big estates, yachts, paintings worth

When Gloria came home in time for dinner her uncle told her he would like to have a talk with her before dinner, or after dinner, if there wasn't time before dinner. She said they might as well talk now, before dinner.

'Well,' he began, 'I don't think you've been looking at all well lately. I think you ought to get out of New York for a month or two. I really do, Gloria.'

Yes, she had been thinking that too, but she wondered how often he had had a chance to see her to decide she wasn't looking well. 'I haven't saved anything out of my allowance,' she said, 'and as for work - well, you know.'

'This would be a birthday present. It's a little early for a birthday present, but does it make any difference what time of the year it is when you get your present? I'll send you a penny post-card when your birthday comes, and remind you that you've had your present. That is, providing you want to take a trip.'

'But can you afford it?'

'Yes, I can afford it. We don't live on our income any more, Baby' - he often called her that - 'we've been selling bonds and preferred stocks, your mother and I.'

'Oh. On account of me? Do I cost that much?'

He laughed. 'No-ho-ho. You don't seem to realize. Don't you know what's been going on in this country, Baby? We're in the midst of a *depression*. The worst depression in history. You know something about the stock market situation, don't you?'

'I looked up your Bethlehem Steel this morning or yesterday. I forget when it was.'

'Oh, that's all gone, long since, my Steel. And it was U.S. Steel, not Bethlehem.'

'Oh, then I was wrong.'

'I'm glad you took an interest. No, what I've been doing, I've been getting rid of everything I can and do you know what I've been doing? Buying gold.'

'Gold? You mean real gold, the what do they call it - bullion?'

'The real article. Coins, when I can get them, and gold bars, and a few gold certificates, but I haven't much faith in *them*. You know, I don't like to frighten you, but it's going to be a lot worse before it's any better, as the fellow says.'

'How do you mean?'

'What?'

'That's his theory. Next year, according to Wiston, is a presidential year, and we're going to have a revolution.'

'Oh, hoocy.'

'Well, I don't know. A lot of fellows are taking that seriously. A lot of people think there's going to be a change. Looks like Al Smith might get in or Owen D. Young. Some Democrat. But will things be any better? I doubt it. Hoover must have something up his sleeve or things would be a lot worse than they are right now.'

'But you said a revolution. What kind of a revolution? You mean radicals? I know they talk all the time, but I'd rather have Hoover - well, not Hoover, but I wouldn't want to be governed by some of those people. I've met some of them on parties and they're awful.'

'Yes, but what about the farmers? They're dissatisfied. What about in Pittsburgh, all those big factories closed down? I don't know where it's all going to end up. All I can do is do the best I can for you and your mother, so every chance I get I'm turning everything into gold.'

'You're not a chemist. You're an alchemist,' said Gloria.

'Ah ha ha ha ha. Very good. Quite a sense of humour, Baby.'

'Dinner, you two,' said Gloria's mother.

'I'm ready,' said Vandamm. He whispered to Gloria: 'I'll talk to you later about the vacation.'

*

Liggett's story to Emily that night was that he and his friend Casey had gone the rounds of Hell's Kitchen speakeasies, trying to do their own detective work. An old enemy of Casey's turned up, Liggett said, and there was a free for all.

The next day he told her the truth, keeping back only the name of the girl.

He awoke that day stiff with pain and with an early realization that there was something ahead that he had to face. It was totally unlike the feeling he had in the war, when he would know each night that the next morning there would be a bombardment and the danger of an attack; it was less unlike the nervous fear in the days when he first began to row in college; the race day would be

their weight in radium, practically. But lend money? no. He said it was his way of getting even with the wisenheimers that laughed at him the summer before when he said he was going to retire.'

'Uncle, did you say you *knew* this man?' said Gloria.

'Oh, yes. Used to see him around. I knew him to say *hello* to.'

'Where is he now? I mean what ever became of him?'

'Ah, that's what I was going to tell you,' said Vandamm. 'I was inquiring about him, whatever became of him, about a month or two ago, and fellow I see every once in a while, a professional bridge player now. I mean makes his living that way, but he used to be a customer's man. I ran into him a short time ago at the New York A. C. and we had a glass of beer together, just friendly because he knows I don't go in for playing bridge for high stakes. We got to talking and in the course of the conversation Jack Wiston's name - that was his name, Jack Wiston, if you want to know his name. His name came up and I asked this friend of mine what ever became of Jack? "Didn't you hear?" my friend said. Very surprised. He thought everybody knew about Wiston. Seems Wiston had the yacht reconditioned and started out on a trip around the world. I understand he had a couple of Follies girls with him and one or two friends. When they got to one of the South Sea Islands, Wiston said that was as far as he was going, and sent everybody on home in the yacht. Bought himself a big copra plantation -'

'I've always wanted to ask that, what's a copra plantation?'

'Uh, copra? It's what they get cocoanut oil from. So -'

'I've often wondered when I read stories in the *Cosmopolitan* -'

'Well, that's what Wiston must have done too, because it was one of those Dutch islands. The story that got back was that Wiston didn't believe in big nations any more. Large countries, doomed to failure, he said. The trend was the other way. There wasn't a single major power in the world that wasn't in sorry straits, but take any little country like Holland or Belgium and Denmark, they were weathering the depression better than *any* large country, irregardless of which one it was. The way I heard, he said he was thirty-eight, thirty-nine then, years of age, he had his good health and a reasonable expectation of at least twenty more years of an active life, and he didn't want to be beaten to death or shot next year, 1932.'

the button beside his bed to the kitchen. The button has not been used since it was installed.

She had made the offer to get in bed with him, and he had not taken up the offer immediately. She was not going to lie beside him.

She went to her own room. It was not early for the *Times* and the *Tribune*. She thought she might have a book so early in the day; that is, there was so much water in the tub that it would not be a good thing for the girls' sleep to run a tub now. It was one of those things that made her far from perfect housewife; but it was good enough, in only once in a while she would be for improvement. Thinking of the

Barbara was actively at sea. Her left arm almost straight out, she was lying in a twisted position with her mouth open just a little, first reminding Emily of the face of a Red Cross nurse.

long until the race started in the late afternoon, and full of things to worry about, but then the boring alumni and muscle-feeders and door-openers would start coming around noon and by starting time the race was almost a pleasant escape. No, this was more like the time he had gonorrhea and had to force himself to the doctor's office, horribly in ignorance of what the treatment was going to be. He had known men with it, of course, but he was sure his was a special case and he could not talk to anyone about it. This morning was like that and like a time when he stayed away from the dentist for two and a half years. It was the knowledge that the unpleasant thing ahead was something that he himself had to force himself to do, that it was in his own hands, no one else could make him do it.

He thought he was awake very early and long before Emily, but when he groaned a little in a way that was like a sigh, she was standing at his bed before his eyes were fully open. She had been sleeping in a chaise-longue which she had moved into his room. His first angry thought was that she had done that to try to catch what he might say in his sleep, but her manner and her words changed this: 'What is it, darling?'

He looked up at her, taking a good look at her for a change.

'Go on back to sleep, darling. It's ten minutes of six. Or shall I get you something? A bedpan?'

'No. I don't want anything.'

'Does it hurt? Is it painful where they hit you?'

'Who hit me?'

'The men, the friends of Casey's that beat you up. Oh, you poor dear. You haven't tried to move. You don't know yet that you're hurt. Well, don't try to move. You've been badly beaten up, darling. Do you want me to get in bed with you? I'll keep you warm and I won't bump you. You don't want me to close the window, do you? Get some more sleep if you can.'

'I think I will,' he said. Then: 'What about you?'

'Oh, don't worry about me. It's almost my regular time to be up, anyway. The girls will be awake in another half or three quarters of an hour.'

'I don't want to see them.'

'I know. I won't let them come in. You go on back to sleep. I'll connect the buzzer.' She referred to the line which ran from

be love with Ruth, one love. Barbara was the one to worry about, with one love after another, and many pains and the need for watching. Emily thought she knew for the first time why she thought oftener of Ruth. The reason was that Ruth and she understood each other; Ruth understood about Barbara, and she understood about herself. That was good - but it was too neat. No; if Ruth understood so much then she must be unhappy about something else. What? She went back to the thoughts of Ruth's little-woman's body. It was all there, ready to move in on life; the breasts were small, but they were there; the hips were not large, but they were there; and part of the intelligence, or part of the information behind the intelligent look of the eyes was the knowledge Emily had imparted to Ruth nearly two years ago. Ruth knew the mechanics of the female, as much as could be told in words. No, no. The look of those eyes, it wasn't an intelligent look; it was just that they were intelligent eyes. There was a difference. But Emily made up her mind that she would watch Ruth with boys, *because of love*.

She poured the coffee and took a cup in to Weston's room. 'I brought you some coffee,' she said.

What she did not know was that he had meanwhile manufactured the antagonism that was necessary before he could tell her the truth. Also he wanted to tell her because he felt that if he told her the truth as it was up to this minute, he would not be so much to blame if something else was going to happen - and he was not by any means sure that nothing else was going to happen. He had to see Gloria again, he knew that, and he knew that even though he didn't want Gloria now, the next thing he would want would be Gloria.

'Will you get me a cigarette out of my coat pocket, please?' he said. 'Thanks, Emily. I want to tell you something. That's probably the last favour I'll ask you to do for me, and when I tell you what I'm going to tell you you won't want to do any more.'

'Do you have to tell me now?'

'Right now. I won't go through the day wanting to tell you. I'll go crazy if I do.'

'Well, in that case.'

'You sound almost as though you knew what I was going to tell you.'

'Shh.'

'Is it time for school?'

'No,' Emily whispered.

'Good.' Ruth smiled and closed her eyes again, then opened them again to say: 'Why are you up so early?'

'I don't want you to make any noise. Daddy isn't feeling well and we mustn't make any noise.'

'What's the matter with Daddy?'

'He was beaten up in a fight last night.' Emily did not know what she was saying until she had said it. It had not occurred to her to lie to this child of hers. The words were out, and Emily looked for a reason for the frankness. She could find none.

'Oh,' Ruth said it and said it again: 'Oh.'

Emily could see what was going on in her mind, could tell it from the two ohs. The first was pain and the quick sympathy that you would expect from Ruth. The second was wanting to ask how, where, when, by whom, how badly – and a firm control of her tongue.

'He wasn't *badly* hurt,' said Emily, 'but they hurt him. When Barbara wakes up don't say anything about it to her, dear.'

'She'll be noisy, though. You know how she always is.'

'Tell her Daddy has a headache and not to make any noise.'

'Is there any thing I can do? I don't want to go back to sleep now.'

'The best thing is to keep quiet, not to make a sound that will disturb Daddy.'

'How did they hurt him?'

'In the ribs mostly, and punched him in the face. Don't worry about him, Ruthie. Try to sleep again.'

She smoothed her daughter's hair, as though Ruth had a fever, and ended with a few little pats on the forehead. She went to the kitchen and started the coffee percolator. She sat down and waited, staring straight ahead and thinking about Ruth with her lovely intelligent innocent eyes, and her sing-song voice when she said: 'What's the matter with Daddy?' All the innocent things about her eyes and her face and her ruffled hair and her voice – then she thought of the form outlined under the bed-clothes. At this minute, probably in New Haven or in Cambridge, some young man who would one day . . . No, it would be all right. It would

the close of the school year? Wasn't it a good thing New York meant living in an apartment? How awful if it had been in a house, a real home? Ah, but if it had been anywhere else he wouldn't have brought that girl here, to an apartment. No, it wasn't so good that New York meant living in an apartment. That was only a consoling thought and not a matter for congratulation. Let him talk.

'... tried to swing at him, the policeman, but ...'

Who cared? Now he was describing the fight. Why hadn't he been killed? He looked so foolish and unrelated to her, with his bandages and bruises. She knew he wasn't asking for sympathy, but she couldn't help denying it to him. What he had asked in the beginning and what she thought would be so hard - to think of him as someone she knew who had nothing to do with her, not married to her, but someone she knew - that was what she felt. Telling the end of the story, or the second half of it, or the latter two-thirds, or whatever it was that remained after 'So I brought her here,' he was like someone who had nothing to do with her, someone not married to her, someone she knew and did not even like, did not even hate. Here was a man whom she could not escape, who was telling a long and pretty dull story about an amour and how he came to be beaten up. Come to think of it she once knew a man like that, a man who got you in a corner and told you long dull stories about his love life, what a boy he was with the ladies, and how he got into fights. The man's name was Weston Liggett.

'Oh, no,' she said.

'What?' he said.

The fool thought she was protesting at something he had said, when she only meant to pull herself together. 'Oh, no, I mustn't think hysterically,' was what she meant to say, but the Oh-no part had come out in spoken words.

'Well, and that's all,' he said. 'I wanted to tell you because I didn't - I couldn't stand lying here and letting you wait on me - what are you, what on earth are you laughing at?'

'You can't stand lying here. I just thought it was obvious that you can't stand and lie down at the same time.'

'Oh, it's funny.'

'I can guess. It's about a woman.'

'Yes.'

'Well, I don't want to hear it now. I know you've been unfaithful. You've stayed with another woman. I don't want to hear the rest of it at this hour of the morning.'

'Well, you'll have to hear it. If you don't mind, please, I want to tell you now.'

'Why?'

'Emily, for Christ's sake.'

'All right.'

'I want to tell you the truth about this because it's a very special thing. Can you look at it this way? Can you, uh, think of me as someone you know that has nothing to do with you, not married to you, but someone you know? Please try to. Well, this man, me, last Saturday night. . . .'

From the time he reached the point where he told about bringing Gloria to this apartment Emily did not try to follow his words. He told the story in chronological order up to that point, and she got a kind of excitement out of listening and wondering how he would reach what was for her the climax of the story; the awful climax, but the climax. She knew what was coming, but she never expected to hear the words: 'So I brought her here.' The words were not separate; they were part of a sentence: '. . . got in a taxi and I didn't have any baggage so I brought her here and we had a few drinks and . . .'. But the last words that she paid attention to were: 'So I brought her here.' After that he went on and on. She knew his throat was dry because his voice broke a little but she did not offer to get him a glass of water. Every once in a while he would ask if she was listening and she would nod and he would say she didn't seem to be, and then continue. She had been sitting on the bed when he began. Once she changed her position so that she sat in a chair beside the head of the bed and she would not have to look at him. 'Go on,' she would say. Let him talk himself out. She didn't care how long he talked. She was back from Reno, back in Boston, it was 1932, the girls were at Winsor School, she was avoiding her father and his well-meaning solicitousness. Mrs Winchester Liggett. Mrs Emily W. Liggett.

What did people generally do with furniture? What did they do for immediate cash? Wasn't it a good thing that it was so near

much more than that as I can, later in the week. I'm going because I don't want you to take the girls out to the country at least for the time being.'

'Why not?'

'Because they're looking for that Two-Gun Crowley, the fellow that murdered a policeman. He's somewhere on Long Island and there's a big reward out for him. Long Island will be full of crazy people with guns and policemen wanting to shoot this Crowley and it won't be safe. Now please take my advice on this. Stay here till they've captured him or at least till the excitement blows over.'

'What else?'

'That's all, I guess. If you want a lawyer, Harry Draper's good. He isn't a divorce lawyer, but if you were planning to go to Reno, for instance, you won't need a divorce lawyer here. The New York lawyer will have a correspondent in Reno. That's the way they always do it, unless the divorce is contested, then sometimes they -'

'If you don't mind I'd rather not go into details now.' She shut the door quickly, because she suddenly knew by his face that he wanted her, and much as she loathed him, this would be one of the times when he could have her. That was disgusting.

He knew some of that, too.

Chapter 7

THAT same day, Wednesday, a coincidence occurred: Gloria decided she didn't want to see Eddie for a couple of days, and Eddie decided he didn't want to see Gloria for a couple of days.

Gloria went shopping with her mother, purchasing a beach hat with a flowered linen band, for \$8.50; a suit of beach pyjamas with horizontal striped top to the trousers, which cost her mother \$29.50. She bought a surf suit that tied at both shoulders for \$10.95. A one-piece bouclette frock cost \$29.50 and a stitched wool hat with a feather cost \$3.95. Also a linen suit, navy jacket and white skirt, for the incredible price of \$7.95.

'No, not funny,' she said, 'but I don't know what you expect me to do. I won't congratulate you.'

'Well, at least I've been honest with you. Now you can do as you please.'

'What do you suppose I please?'

'How should I know. I'll give you a divorce. I mean, if you want a divorce in New York I'll give you grounds.'

'You have. But I don't want to talk about that now.'

'You haven't one word of understanding. Not a single instinct of understanding.'

'Oh, now really.'

'Yes, now really. You didn't even try to understand. The only thing that interested you was that I was unfaithful. You didn't care about anything else.'

'I'm not going to quarrel with you. I'm not going to let you turn this into a little spat. I don't want to talk about it.'

'You've got to talk about it. You've got to tell me what you're going to do. I was honest with you, I told you the truth when I didn't have to. You believed the story I made up.'

'I beg your pardon, but I didn't believe the story you made up. I did at first, but not when I thought over it. I knew there was more to it than that. And don't tell me I've got to tell you what I'm going to do, or that I *have* to talk about it. There aren't any more have-to's as far as you and I are concerned.'

'We'll see.'

'All right, we'll see.'

'Emily,' he said.

She walked out.

He dressed and had breakfast after the girls had gone to school. He knocked on Emily's door and she called: 'Yes?'

'May I see you a minute, please?'

'What about?'

'I'm leaving.'

She opened the door.

'You can stay.'

'Thanks, but I'm not going to. I just want to tell you, first of all, I'm going to a hotel. I'll let you know which one when I've decided. Probably the Biltmore. In the second place, I'll deposit some money for you some time today, five hundred now, and as

about? Had she gone completely screwy that she was planning anything with Liggett, when for all she knew he had a fractured skull? What if he had a fractured skull? It would be a nice mess and it wouldn't take the police long to get her mixed up in it. Why, there was a policeman right there in the speakeasy when she ran out. All he had to do was ask the bartender her name, and she'd be mixed up in it. She was frightened and she read over again what it said about Tuesday: '... may be a nervous and upsetting day in many ways.' It certainly had been. It said Tuesday evening was satisfactory for pleasure and dealings with the other sex on a friendship basis, but her relations with Liggett had not been on a friendship basis, not by a whole hell of a lot, as Eddie would say. No, this stuff was right; ordinarily she didn't put much stock in it, but it was like superstitions; maybe there was something to them so it didn't do any harm to be careful. Besides, it was right enough about Tuesday being nervous and upsetting, and when you considered daylight saving time, then all that mess in the speakeasy was part of Tuesday the day, and not the evening. Do not expect too much of Wednesday . . . routine. Well, she would have Eddie's girl Miss Day's suit cleaned, and returned the fur coat, those ought to be routine things. Tomorrow was Thursday, the day to be careful about disagreements and quarrels in business (that ought to cover the coat, so she would forestall any trouble tomorrow by returning the coat today), and she would guard against a quarrel with her sweetheart by returning the coat. How to do it would have to be figured out later. But she did not ignore the case with which she was thinking of Liggett as her sweetheart. Whatever he was, she loved him. 'Don't I?' she asked.

*

When he was alone in his apartment Eddie smoked a pipe. It was one of the few gifts his father had given him that was not cash outright. It had '2Sg' in silver on the front of the bowl, which was the way his father had ordered it, but it happened to be a good pipe and Eddie liked it in spite of the adornment. It was cheaper than cigarettes, and when he had money Eddie usually bought a half-pound or a pound tin of tobacco and laid in a supply of cigarette papers. Thus he almost always had something to smoke.

It was a furnished apartment, and probably had a history, but

for \$29.50, a tricot turban with a halo twist was \$12.50, and two pique tennis dresses (with crocheted belt) for \$10.75 apiece. Her uncle had given her mother \$150 to spend and the purchases were practically on the dot of that sum. Gloria made the purchases with practically no interference from her mother and she felt good and went home for the express purpose of sending Norma Day's suit to the dry cleaners'.

She was wrapping the suit in newspaper but she could not resist reading the paper. It was Monday's *Mirror*, and she was surprised to discover that she had missed reading Walter Winchell's column. She skimmed through it for a possible mention of her name (you never could tell) and then she read more carefully, learning that Barbara Hutton was being sent to Europe to forget Phil Plant, that the Connie Bennett-Marquis de la Falaise thing was finished, 'Joel McRae being the new heart.' She read a few lines from that day's instalment of 'Grand Hotel', which was running in the *Mirror*, and then she turned to 'What Your Stars Foretell': 'Today in particular,' it said, 'should bring encouragement to correspondents, typists, writers, and advertisers. Tuesday may be a nervous and upsetting day in many ways, but Tuesday evening as well as Wednesday evening are very satisfactory for pleasure and dealings with the other sex on a friendship basis. Do not expect too much of Wednesday. It is not a good day for anything outside of the regular routine, and Thursday will be a discouraging day for those with tempers. Beware of disagreements and quarrels in business and with your sweetheart. Saturday should be a very encouraging day from almost any angle; you may act with confidence in either social or business matters. This week is favourable for those born Jan. 29 to Feb. 10, Mar. 3-11, April 1-10, May 5-12, June 2-9, July 7-12, Aug. 1-8, Nov. 15-20, Nov. 29-Dec. 5, Dec. 7-11, Dec. 24-28.' Well, her birthday was December 5, so taking it altogether, by and large, if she would be careful today and keep her temper tomorrow - not that she had a really bad temper, but sometimes she did fly off the handle - she ought to have a good week, because Saturday was going to be a very encouraging day from almost any angle, the stars foretold. It might be a good time to plan a trip, and immediately she thought of Liggett. All these clothes, they were for the summer and the trip her uncle was going to give her, but if the weather was nice - but what was she thinking

bathroom door. The pictures that remained were an amateur's replica of a Georgia O'Keeffe orchid, and a Modigliani print. There were a few ash trays from Brass Town via Woolworth.

Whenever he shaved Eddie would hum 'I Got Rhythm'. The reason for this was that he once had used the words in a sentence: 'I had crabs but I got rhythm.' He had first thought it up in the bathroom, while shaving, and he would always recall it, at least until something else took its place. Eddie never told anyone he could use the title in a sentence; it was not his kind of humour. Some day he would hear someone else say it and then he would stop thinking of it. That, exactly that, often happened to Eddie. He would make up puns, keep them to himself, and then he would hear them from someone else and they would cease to be his property. It made him wonder; he thought it was indicative of a great lack in himself; not that he cared about the puns, but it was just as true of his own work, his drawing. Once he had an idea that he turned into something; the drawings he did in college. But he also had thought and worked out a technique that was very much like that of James Thurber. In his case he knew it to be reminiscent of the technique employed in a 1917 book called *Dere Mabel*, by Ed Streeter, drawings by Bill Breck, but still he had done nothing with his idea, and then along came Thurber with his idea, and look what he did: everybody knew who Thurber was - and the people who knew who Brunner was were making a pretty good job of forgetting it.

All these things ran through Eddie's mind, which was like blood running through Siamese twins; there was a whole other half of his mind.

Then he began to consider the other half of his mind, and gave himself up a little to the pleasure of the day, the first pleasure of its kind since he had come to New York. For this day, not two hours before he had come here to this apartment and lit this pipe and looked at this furniture and wondered about this lack in himself - two hours ago he had been promised work, and given a half promise of a job. 'I won't say yes and I won't say no,' the man had said. 'All I'll tell you positively now is we can use your drawings.'

The work was for a movie company, in the advertising department, the art room of the advertising department. Eddie had gone there for a job several times two years ago, because he knew there

the only part of its history that interested Eddie was that it had come down in price from \$65 to \$50 a month. Something undoubtedly had taken place in the apartment to account for the lowering of the rental. As Eddie well knew, the depression did not result in decreases in rents of apartments that took in \$100 a month or less. One-room and two-room apartments cost just as much as they always had, and renting agents could even be a little choosy, for people who formerly had paid \$200 and more now were leasing the cheaper apartments, and paying their rent. So there must have been a reason why this apartment could be held for fairly regular payments of \$50 a month. It must not be inferred that Eddie never had any interest at all in the processes that brought about the reduction. At first he wondered about it a little; the furniture was not the kind that is bought for a furnished apartment and the hell with it. No, this was hand-picked stuff, obviously left there by a previous tenant. Eddie thought it possible that the previous tenant had been slain, perhaps decapitated with a razor. He resolved some day to suggest as a magazine article the idea of going around to various apartments in New York where famous crimes had occurred. The apartment where Elwell, the bridge player, was killed; the Dot King apartment; the room in the Park Central where Arnold Rothstein was killed. Find out who lived in the apartment now, whether the present occupant knew Elwell for instance, had lived there; what kind of person would live in an apartment where there had been a murder; how it affected the present tenant's sleep; whether any concession was made in the rent; whether the real estate people told the prospective tenant that the apartment had a past. It was one of the ideas that Eddie had and rejected for himself because he did not know how to write, but would have passed on to a writer friend if he had any.

It was hard to tell whether this apartment had been a man's or a woman's. The distinguishing small things had been taken away. There was a bed that could be disguised in the daytime with a large red cover; a cheap (it was all cheap) modern armchair; a small fireplace that did not look too practical; a folding bridge table; three modern lamps; a straight-back chair like a '5' with the horizontal bar cut off. Over the fireplace was a coloured map of New York with cute legends, and there was a map of Paris, apparently executed by the same cartographer, on the inside of the

tits till I want to chew the paper, but these girls are not supposed to have that kind of tits, you know what I mean. What I want is more on the order of John Held Jr. You know. Comedy girls. I want them female, but I don't want to stress the sex angle.' He smiled and shook his head. 'We did a campaign, God damn, boy, we had everything but the old thing in every paper in town. The picture was a terrible turkey, "Strange Virgin", but they almost held it over the second week it did such business, and every other company in town was bellyaching to the Hays office about our ads, so we got the credit for whatever business the picture did. Maybe you saw the campaign?'

'I sure did.'

'The one where she's lying with her legs out like this, and the guy! I did that one *myself*. We even had squawks from André Jacinto on that. He happened to be in town making personal appearances when the ads came out and oh, he called up and he blew the house down, he was that sore. "Listen," he said, "maybe I am like that and maybe I'm not, but you got no God damn licence to put something in the ads that ain't in the picture." That gave me a laugh, because when you take into consideration what that ad looked like he was doing, it'll take a long time before they put that in any picture they make in Hollywood. Maybe over West Forty-sixth Street, that kind of a picture. But for the time being. Well, anyway, that was some campaign. The other companies squawked to the Hays office, but I don't mind telling you I got myself two very nice offers from the companies that squawked the loudest. But with such a college picture we require an altogether different technique. You know? Dames, but cute, and comedy. Stress the comedy angle. I tell you what I'll do, Mr Brunner. I'll take the responsibility on my own head. You go on in and sit down and just give me all you got on a couple roughs like what I have in mind, and if I like them I'll give you twenty-fy dollars top price for all we use, then if I like them maybe we can come to some kind of an arrangement about more work in the future.'

Eddie did some drawings and the man said they were sensational. He'd take one anyway. Mr De Paolo would be proud, he said. He made out a voucher for \$25 and told Eddie to come back next Friday. 'Oh, of course if you were going to see Mr De Paolo maybe

was a Stanford man, a couple of classes ahead of him, working in the department. But the Stanford man at that time had been terrified at the idea of being responsible for increasing the company's payroll by another salary. He knew that the officials of the company were worried about their own nepotism and the cousins of cousins were being laid off. And so Eddie had said well, he would leave a few drawings just in case, and never heard any more.

Then this morning he had gone to that office for the first time in nearly two years. He had asked for his old friend and had been told that the friend was in Hollywood. Then could he see someone in the department? Yes, he could see the man in charge of the art room. The man in charge of the art room listened with a mystifying respect to Eddie's account of his experience of two years ago. The man said: 'Oh, I see. You were a personal friend of Mr De Paolo's?'

'Yes, I knew him in college. That's what I was saying.'

'Have you heard from him lately?'

'Well, no, not lately. I understand he's in Hollywood,' said Eddie.

'Yes, but we expect him back in a day or two. Thursday or Friday.'

'Well, then I'll come in and see him then. Will you tell him Eddie Brunner was in? Tell him I have some ideas for him.'

'For Benny the Beetle?' the man said.

'No.'

'He needs some for Benny.'

'No, these are just some of my own drawings I thought he could use.'

'Oh, do you draw?'

'Yes.'

'Mm,' said the man, and put on his thinking look. 'Just a minute, Mr Brunner.' The man left the office and was gone five minutes. He came back with a batch of rough advertising lay-outs. 'Could you do something with these?'

'Jesus, yes. That's just my stuff,' said Eddie. The lay-outs were for a campaign advertising a college picture. 'Do you want me to try?'

'Sure do. I think these are lousy, and the boys in the department just don't seem to get the right angle. No yoomer. They can draw

and come to think of it, all of them including Norma had to go to bed for one day out of every twenty-eight. They were all fundamentally the same, and probably they were all fundamentally Norma.

About love Eddie was not so sure. The thing that he supposed existed, that kept together a man and woman all their lives and made them bring up children and have a home and that kept them faithful to each other unquestioningly and apparently without temptation - he had not seen that in his own home and so he was not personally acquainted with it. He was not sure that he ever had seen it, either. He knew, for instance, that he saw the parents of his friends in a way that was totally unlike the way his friends saw them. All through his adolescence he practically took for granted that Mr Latham and Mr O'Neill and Mr Dominick and Mr Girardot, fathers of his closest friends of that period, were unfaithful to Mrs Latham and Mrs O'Neill and Mrs Dominick and Mrs Girardot. He never spoke of it, because his friends never did, but if they had he was sure he would have come right out and said what he thought. He had it thought out beyond that: he believed that those fathers were human, and subject to desire, a thing which did not have to be forgiven except in the case of his own father. His own father had inadvertently taught him to accept infidelity in all other fathers but himself. On the other hand Eddie liked absolute faithfulness in a wife, not so much because his own mother practised it, but because as a result of her practising it she became finally a much better person in his eyes than his father. The years of being constant were a lot like years of careful saving, compared with years of being a spendthrift. It was just that it was easier to be a spendthrift than to save. Of course sometimes you saved for nothing better than a bank crash, but even though you lost everything that was in the bank, you still had something around the eyes, something in the chin, that showed you had been a saver. Sometimes he would say to himself: 'Yes, but your mother was pretty stupid.' All right, what if she was? She had kept her promise, which was more than his father had done. Eddie had no liking for the fellows in college who thought it would be swell to have a father who was more like an older brother. If his father had been an older brother Eddie would have been likely to give him a punch in the nose. Not that he

I'll see you before that.' There was just a chance that there might possibly be a regular job there for Eddie.

Before he left the place Eddie of course had found out that his old friend De Paolo had struck it rich; he was in charge of the work on Benny the Beetle, the company's own plagiarism of Mickey Mouse. . . .

On twenty-five a week Eddie figured he could even go to a movie now and then and get a load of Benny the Beetle. It was too much to hope for a steady job in an art department, where they certainly would pay more than twenty-five a week, but if the friendship with De Paolo had got him this far, no telling how far he would get when Polly - De Paolo - came to town, always providing Polly hadn't gone high-hat and wouldn't pass him up. But he didn't think Polly would go high-hat. High-powered, maybe, but not high-hat.

And so Eddie breathed in streams of tobacco smoke, tobacco that he had dug out of the luxurious bottom of the can, where it was still faintly moist and had a flavour. He had \$23 and some change, he didn't know how much; in his kick right now. Five dollars for canned goods would leave \$18 plus, and would assure him of food for at least a week. Take Norma to a show, tickets at Jo Leblang's. Explain the situation to Norma, whom he had permitted to pay his rent on a loan basis, in return for which he put up her kid brother, a junior at the University of Pennsylvania, who came to town every other week-end to see a girl friend of Norma's. Norma had her own money, left her by a grandmother, and she also had a job as secretary to an assistant professor at N.Y.U. She and her brother were orphans and her brother had his own money too, but in trust until he was twenty-one years old.

What about Norma, anyway? Eddie now asked himself. He had the feeling that his troubles were over, temporarily, and he wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to marry Norma. He thought back over the years, and it might as well have been Norma all along. His succession of girls always had been about the same general type; smallish, usually with breasts rather large for the girl's height; sometimes the girl would be chunky. They had to have a feeling for jazz that was as good as you can expect in a girl. They had to be cute rather than blasé, a little on the slangy side,

he had found the girl he wanted to marry. A laundry called him on the telephone, and that prevented his having an affair with Gloria. Good. Something beyond his understanding had intervened, he was sure of that; maybe it was only his luck. Well, he wasn't going to fool with his luck. When he saw Norma tonight he would ask her to marry him. No money, no job, no nothing. But he knew she was the one he wanted to marry. He laughed a little. He was pretty proud of Norma, and he loved her very much. He was already loyal to her, too; in the sense that in his mind he could defend her against the kind of thing Gloria might say about her: he could hear Gloria calling Norma a mouselike little creature (although Norma was the same size girl as Gloria, and, speaking of mice, it was not hard to imagine someone saying Norma had a mind like a steel trap). Eddie let his loyalty go to Norma and did not try to deny to himself that this probably was at the expense of his loyalty to Gloria.

It was strange about Gloria, how he always had had this feeling of loyalty to her. Offhand he could not recall a time when there had been any need for it; yet he knew that with the life Gloria led there probably were dozens of people who said things about her that, if he heard them, would evoke a loyal response and some kind of protective action on his part. He had been ready to defend Gloria at any time when he might meet someone who said things about her or did things to her. By God it was an instinctive thing: that first night he saw her he lent her money when money was life to him. It saddened him to think of the things implicit in his decision to marry Norma. One of these things was the giving up part. Maybe he was wrong (he admitted) but always it seemed to him as though he and Gloria were many many times on the verge of a great romance, one for the ages, or at least a match for the love and anguish of Amory and Rosalind in 'This Side of Paradise' and Frederick and Catherine in 'A Farewell to Arms'. He nodded to an undefined thought: that yes, to marry Norma was a sensible thing and if out of the hundred pounds of the relationship between himself and Norma there was one ounce sensible thing, that one ounce was an imperfect, unromantic thing. All right; what of it? There never had been much romance in his past romances, and he distrusted romance for his own self; in a sort of Elks-tooth way his father had been a romantic guy, and he was not going to have

idealized any other father he knew, but because he never met father whom he regarded as the ideal did not mean that none such existed. Psychology and the lines of thought it indicated mildly fascinated Eddie, and he approved some of it; but he was not willing to ascribe, say, fidelity to a weakness or a dishonesty. Maybe it all did come down to the value of a promise. You gave your word that you would pay back some money, you gave your word that you would not sleep with another woman; in either case it was a promise, and if you couldn't depend on a promise the nothing was any good.

He was always telling himself that when he got older and knew more he would take up the subject of promises. But he hoped the day never would come when he did not believe a promise — just a promise, and not all the surrounding stuff about Gentleman and Honour — was a good and civilized thing.

He was lying on his bed thinking these things, and he suddenly felt disgust with himself. For only yesterday he had come within inches of laying Gloria, and months ago he had promised Norma that he would not stay with anyone else. All his self-satisfied introspection went away and he could not find anywhere in his thoughts that would justify what he had all but done. It was not his fault that it had not been done. There it was, the first time his promise to Norma had been put to a test, and right away, without even thinking about it, he was ready for Gloria, very God damn ready; and it was worse because he had come so close without thinking about it. It was possible that if he had thought it out he would have found a reason, if no other reason than that he would stay with Gloria and stop staying with Norma. Then next he was thinking the thing he always thought when he was getting out of one romance and beginning another: the self-reproach that he was no better than his father; that he was his father's son. Maybe the psychoanalysts would tell him that that helped to explain how he would be faithful to a girl for months, then get another girl and be faithful to her until he was unfaithful. That's the way it had been, and almost the way it was this minute, with Norma and Gloria. But he had not stayed with Gloria; for that break he thanked his luck. If he had he would have had to tell Norma. But he hadn't. That seemed to him an important thing, one of the most important things in his life, and at that moment he decided

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lying there and saddened by the waste of shapely breasts and the excitement in oneself with a man, and the excitement of a man's excitement. And then nothing to do about it but lie there, almost afraid to touch one's breasts, probably, or anything else; and remembering one man long ago. There was only one possible explanation for being able to live in memory like that, and Gloria felt tears in her eyes at the thought of her father's and mother's love.

It showed, too. It showed in her mother's face. It worried Gloria a little to come round again to a theory she sometimes had that a woman ought to have one man and quit. It made for a complete life no matter how short a time it lasted. Gloria resolved to be a better girl, and after a long but not unpleasant time she fell asleep, preferring her own face but thinking well of her mother's.

She had breakfast in her room. It was too warm a day for breakfast in bed. To have breakfast in bed ought to be a luxury and not a nuisance, and it was a nuisance when covering over the legs was a nuisance, as it was this day. She drank the double orange juice and wanted more, but Elsie, the maid, had gone back to the kitchen out of call. Gloria drank her coffee and ate her toast and poured another cup of coffee. Then a cigarette. While having breakfast she was busy with her hands. With no one to look at her she swung her butter knife like a bandmaster's baton, not humming or singing, but occasionally letting her throat release a note. She felt good.

What, if anything, she had decided the night before had not been changed by the morning and the good night's sleep, principally because she had not fixed upon a new mode of life. The good night's sleep she knew had a lot to do with the absence of her usual morning despair, but it wasn't that she was happy, exactly. It came close to the feeling that she was ready for anything today, whereas if she had come to a solemn decision the night before to be an angel thence-forward, she would now be having a special kind of gaiety - not removed from the despair - that was cap-over-the-windmill stuff. No; today she felt good. The big problem of Liggett would be settled somehow, not without an awful scene and maybe not right away, but it would probably be all right - and that concession was a step in the right direction, she thought. She felt good, and she felt strong.

'I just wanted to try it on. They're handy.'

'Well, I don't think so, Gloria. When I'm tempted to buy a dress because I think it's going to be handy, I think twice about it. Those handy dresses, so-called, I should say a woman won't get as much out of one of those as she will out of a really frivolous dress. I mean in actual number of hours that they're worn. Take your black satin . . .'

Clothes, and cooking, and curiously enough the way to handle men, were matters in which Gloria had respect for her mother's opinions. Packing, housecleaning, how to handle servants, what to do for blotches in the complexion, kitchen chemistry, the peculiarities of various fabrics — Mrs Wandrous knew a lot about such matters. It occurred to Gloria that her mother was a perfect wife. The fact that her husband was dead did nothing to change that. In fact that was part of it. And any time anybody had any doubt about how well her mother could manage a house, all they had to do was count up the number of times Gloria's uncle had had to complain. No, her mother was a fine housekeeper, and she knew how to handle men. Gloria often would hear her mother say that if So-and-So did such and such she'd be happier with her husband. What Gloria meant was that her mother, dealing with her kind of man in her kind of life, was just as capable as she was with baking soda in the kitchen. Mrs Wandrous knew what baking soda could be made to do, and she knew what the kind of man she would be likely to have dealings with (who bored Gloria to death) would do. It was almost a good life, Gloria decided. Without regret she recognized the impossibility of it for her; but a pretty good life for someone like her mother.

That Wednesday night after she went to bed she lay there trying, not very hard, to read, and thinking about her mother. Now there was a woman who had known (Gloria was sure) only one man in her entire life. Known meaning slept with. And that had not lasted very long. Yet after twenty years her mother was able to recall every detail of sleeping with a man, almost as though it had happened last night. She had not discussed it at any length with her mother, but now and then a thing would be said that showed how well her mother remembered. Think of living that way! Going to bed these nights, so many nights through so many years; some nights dropping off to sleep, but surely some nights

to Dartmouth before that and he's even taller than I am, and I haven't the faintest idea when we're going to be married.'

'How long have you known him? What's he like?'

'Since Christmas. He's from Seattle and he spent Christmas with friends of mine in Greenwich which is how I happened to meet him. I sat next to him at dinner the night after Christmas, and he was the quiet type, I thought. He looked to be the quiet type. So I found out what he did and I began talking about gastroenterostomies and stuff and he just sat there and I thought, What is this man? He just sat there and nodded all the time I was talking. You know, when I was going to be a nurse year before last. Finally I said something to him. I asked him if by any chance he was listening to what I was saying, or bored, or what? "No, not bored," he said. "Just cockeyed." And he was. Cockeyed. It seems so long ago and so hard to believe we were ever strangers like that, but that's how I met him, or my first conversation with him. Actually he's very good. His family have loads of money from the lumber business and I've never seen anything like the way he spends money. But only when it doesn't interfere with his work at P. and S. He has a Packard that he keeps in Greenwich and hardly ever uses except when he comes to see me. He was a marvellous basketball player at Dartmouth and two weeks ago when he came up to our house he hadn't had a golf stick in his hands since last summer and he went out and shot an eighty-seven. He's very homely, but he has this dry sense of humour that at first you don't quite know whether he's even listening to you, but the things he says. Sometimes I think - oh, not really, but a stranger overhearing him might suggest sending him to an alienist.'

'He sounds wonderful! Oh, I'm so glad, darling. When will he go for the ring and all?'

'Well - New Year's Eve he asked me to marry him. If you could call it that. Sometimes even now I can't always tell when he's right. New Year's Eve he was dancing with me and he stopped right in the middle of the floor, stopped dancing and stood away from me and said: "Remind me to marry you this summer."'

'I like that. This summer.'

'No, I guess not this summer. But I don't know. Oh, all I care about is I guess this is it, I hope.'

'It sounds like it to me. The real McCoy, whatever that is. So

She looked at the advertisements in the paper while smoking her second cigarette. She had a patronizing superior feeling toward the advertisements: she had bought practically all the clothes she wanted and certainly all she would need. She had her usual quick visit to the bathroom, and then she had a lukewarm bath and she was dressing when her mother called to her that Ann Paul was on the phone and wanted to speak to her, and should she take the message? Yes, take the message, Gloria told her mother. The message was that Ann wanted to have lunch with her. Gloria said she would come to the phone. She didn't want to have lunch with Ann, but she had known Ann in school and did want to see her, so she asked Ann to come downtown if she could, and Ann said she could.

Ann lived in Greenwich where she lived an athletic life; sailing her own Star, hunting and showing at the minor league horse shows, and in such ways using up the energy which no man had seemed able to get to for his personal use. In school Ann, who was very tall for a girl, was suspect because of a couple of crushes which now, a few years later, her former schoolmates were too free about calling Lesbian, but Gloria did not think so, and Ann must have known that Gloria did not think so. She called Gloria every time she came to New York, which was about twice a month, and the last two times Gloria had not been home for the calls.

Ann came downtown, parked her Ford across the street from Gloria's house, and went right upstairs to Gloria's room. Ann was in the Social Register, which fact impressed Gloria's mother as much as Gloria's indifference to it. Ann was always made to feel at home in Gloria's house.

'I had to see you,' said Ann. 'I have big news.'

'Ah-hah.'

'What?'

'Go ahead.'

'Why did you say ah-hah as if you knew it? Does it show?'

'No. I knew there was something. You've never looked better.'

'Look,' said Ann, and extended her left hand.

'Oh, you girl! Ann! Who is it? When? I mean do I know him or anything?'

'Tell you everything. His name is Bill Henderson and you don't know him and he's at P. and S. and gets out next year and he went

I saw that Bill was the one that really was frightened, not I. I don't mean about children only. But they're so helpless. When we're with people I'm quiet as a mouse and sit there listening to the great man, or when we're dancing I think how marvellously witty he is, with his sense of humour. But when we're really alone it all changes. He's entirely different. At first I used to think he was so gentle, terribly gentle, and it almost killed me. But then I realized something – and this isn't taking anything away from him. He is gentle, but the things about him that I used to think were gentle, they aren't gentle. The really gentle things he does aren't the same things I thought were. What I mistook for being gentle was his own helplessness, or practically helplessness. Yes, helplessness. He *knows* everything, being a medical student, and I don't suppose I'm the first for him, but – Lord! I don't know how to explain it. Do you see what I mean at all?' . . .

'I think so. I think something else too. I think you two ought to get married, right away. Don't lose any of the fun. Right away, Ann. He has his own money, and you have some I know. There's no reason why you should miss anything. Get married.'

'I want to, and he's crazy to, but I'm afraid of interfering with his studies.'

'It won't interfere with his studies. He might have to neglect *you* a little, but he'll be able to study much better with you than he would being in New York and wishing you were here or he was in Greenwich. No, by all means get married. Just look at all the young marriages there are today. People getting married as soon as the boy gets out of college. The hell with the depression. Not that that's a factor in your getting married, but look at all the young couples, read the society pages and see, and there must be a lot of them that are really poor and without jobs. If you got married now and he goes back to P. and S. next year you'd have the fun of living together and all that, and then he'll probably want to go abroad to Vienna or some place to continue his studies, and that will be like a honeymoon. Your family aren't going to insist on a big wedding, are they?'

'Well, Father thinks it's a good thing to keep up appearances. Mother doesn't like the idea as much as she used to. She'd rather use the money for charity, but Father says he's giving more to charity than ever before and with less money to do it on. He's very serious

what are you going to do this summer? Where is - what's his name? Bill?

'Bill Henderson. Well, he wants to go home for a little while just to see his family and then come back. I - I'm sort of embarrassed, Gloria. I don't really know. When he gets ready to tell me something, he tells me, and I never ask him. But what I wanted to see you about, can you come up for the week-end tomorrow? Bill's coming, and I forget whether he's just getting ready for examinations or just finishing them. See? I don't know anything. I just sit and wait.'

'That's good preparation for a doctor's wife.'

'So everyone tells me. But what about it, can you come?'

'I'd love to,' said Gloria. Then, thinking of Liggett: 'I have a half date for the week-end, but I think I can get out of it. Anyway, can I take a rain check if I can't make it this week?'

'Of course. Do try to get out of the other thing. Is this other thing - would you like me to invite someone for you? I mean is there someone that - I could ask your other date.'

'No. It was a big party, a lot of people, not anyone in particular.'

'Then I won't ask anyone for you till I hear from you. Will you all me? Call me tomorrow at home, or else call this afternoon and leave word. Just say you're coming. And of course if you think you can't come and then change your mind at the last minute and decide you can, that's all right too.'

'All right. I'll most likely call you tonight.' Gloria noticed that Ann seemed to have something else to say. 'What, Ann? What are you thinking?'

'I can tell *you*, Gloria,' said Ann. 'Darling, I've had an affair. I and I. We've had an affair. Almost from the very beginning. Do you think any the less of me?'

Oh, certainly not, darling. *Me?*'

I never knew about you. I've always thought you had, but I'd never be sure. It's only in the last six months I found out you can't be sure. It doesn't show on you. You know? You know the next day you're going to be a marked woman and everybody on the street will know. But they don't. And men. Men are so silly. Mothers tell us all our lives that boys lose respect for girls they go all the way with. But they must have changed a lot since my mother was our age. At first I was so frightened, and then

I'll call you tonight for sure and if you're not there I'll leave word that I'm coming or not.'

'All right, my pet,' said Ann, getting up. She kissed Gloria's cheek. 'Good luck, and I'll see you, if not this week, perhaps a week from tomorrow.'

'Mm-hmm. And thanks loads.'

'Oh, I'm the one to thank you,' said Ann, and left.

Gloria thought a long time about how uncontagious love was. According to the book she ought to be wanting to telephone Liggett, and she did want to telephone Liggett in a way, but talking to Ann, virginal Ann with her one man and her happiness and innocence and her awkward love affair (she was sure Bill Henderson wore glasses and had to take them off and put them in a metal case before necking Ann) - it all made her angry with love, which struck in the strangest places. It didn't seem to be any part of her own experience with love, and it depressed her. What possible problems could they have. Ann and Bill? A man from the Pacific Coast comes all the way from the Pacific Coast and finds right here in the east the perfect girl for him. What possible problems could they have? What made them hesitate about getting married? She felt like pushing them, and pushing them roughly and impatiently. They would get married and after a couple of years Bill would have an affair with a nurse or somebody, and for him the excitement would die down. But by that time Ann would have had children, beautiful children with brown bodies in skimpy bathing suits. Ann would sit on the beach with them, looking up now and then from her magazine and calling them by name and answering their foolish questions and teaching them to swim. She would have enormous breasts but she would not get very fat. Her arms would fill out and look fine and brown in evening dress. And, Gloria knew, Ann would slowly get to disliking her. No; that wouldn't be like Ann. But Gloria would be the only person like herself whom Ann could tolerate. Every Ann probably has one Gloria to whom she is loyal. And the girls they had gone to school with, who had made the cracks about Ann's being Lesbian - they would turn out to be her friends, and she would ride with them and play bridge and go to the club dances. They would meet sometimes in the afternoons, parked in their station wagons, waiting for their husbands, and their husbands would get off the train, all wearing

about it. You see he knows Mr Coolidge, and I think he thinks if we invited Mr Coolidge to the wedding he'd come, and that would do a lot toward sort of taking people's minds off the depression.'

'I don't agree with your father.'

'Neither do I. Of course I wouldn't dare say so, but I think Coolidge got us into this depression and he ought to keep out of the papers.'

'That's what I think, too.'

'Well, you've given me something to think about. Not that I hadn't thought of it myself, but whenever I broach the subject people say oh, there's plenty of time. But you're the only one that knows we're practically married right now.'

'Oh, no, you're not,' said Gloria. 'Where do you go?'

'Usually to an apartment of a friend of Bill's.'

'Well, then you've - have you ever spent the whole night?'

'Once.'

'That's not enough. *You're* not practically married.'

'Now do *you* know so much? Gloria, don't tell me you're married?'

'Ho, but I know how it is to wake up with a man you love and have breakfast and all that. It takes time before you get accustomed to each other. Who's going to use the bathroom first, and things like that. Intimacies. Ann, I can tell you a lot.'

'I wish you would.'

'I will. God! I know everything!'

'Why, Gloria.'

'Yes, everything. I know how good it can be and how awful, and you're lucky. You marry Bill right away and hold on to him.'

'I've never seen you like this. Why does it mean so much to you? Is the man you love married?'

'You've guessed it.'

'And his wife won't give him a divorce?'

'Yes,' said Gloria. 'That's it.'

'But couldn't you both go to her and tell her you love each other. Is she a nice woman? How old is she?'

'Oh, we've had it out. Not she and I, but Jack and I.'

'Jack. Do I know him?'

'No.' She was on the verge of confessing that his name was not Jack, but she did not want to tell Ann too much. 'Look, darling,

way to see. And that woman was the only human neighbour that Gloria knew anything about.

But a couple of yards away there was a garden; two yards with no fence between. Grass grew, there was a tree, there were some rose bushes, there were four iron chairs and a table to match with an umbrella standard in the centre of the table. In that garden there was a policee bitch and, just now, four puppies.

The last time Gloria had looked out the sewing-room windows the puppies were hardly more than little pieces of meat, not easy to count and completely helpless.

Now they must have been six weeks old, and as Gloria stood and watched them she forgot all about the woman who was playing the piano, for in a very few minutes she discovered something about the family of policee dogs: the bitch had a favourite.

The bitch's teats had lost their fullness and had gone back into her body, but that did not make the puppies forget that they had got milk there not so long ago. The mother would run away from their persistent attempts to gnaw at her, but one tan little fellow was more persistent than the others, and when the mother and the tan had got far enough away, the mother would stand and let him nibble at her. Then she would swat him good and hard, but, Gloria noticed, not hard enough for him to misunderstand and take offence and get angry with his mother. The mother would open her surprisingly big mouth and lift him up and swing him away from her, then she would take a mighty leap and fly about the garden, chasing sparrows. Meanwhile the other puppies would be waiting for her and when she met them they would try again to take milk from her. Or maybe they were like men, Gloria thought; maybe they knew there was no milk there. And Gloria had a strong suspicion that the mother really liked their making passes at her. She guessed Nature provided the mother with the instinct to swat the puppies away from her. They were old enough to eat solid food now and as a good mother it was her duty to make them look out for themselves.

The mother was a marvellous person. Gloria found herself thinking this and since she was alone and not thinking out loud she went on thinking it. The mother was a marvellous person. Such good qualities as there must be in her, the way she held up her head and her ears stood straight up, and the way she wo-

blue or grey flannel suits and club or fraternity hatbands on their stiff straw hats, with their newspapers folded the same way all of them. And she, Gloria, would visit Ann and Bill once each summer for the first few summers, and the men with the hatbands would make dates for New York. Oh, she knew it all.

She tried to laugh it off when she thought of the motion picture she had thought up for Ann's future, but laughing it off was not easy. It was unsuccessful. Laughing it off was unsuccessful because the picture was accurate, and she knew it. Well, every Gloria, she reminded herself, also had an Ann whom she tolerated and to whom she was loyal. Ann's was not her way of living, but it was all right for Ann. The only possible way for Ann, or rather the only good way. Hell, here she was in a bad humour, and for no apparent reason. You couldn't call Ann's happiness a reason.

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In the rear of the second floor of the house in which Gloria lived there was a room which Mrs Wandrous and the rest of the household called Mrs Wandrous's sewing-room. It was small and none of the furniture made you want to stay in it very long. Mrs Wandrous kept needles and spools of thread and darning paraphernalia and sewing baskets in the room, but she did her sewing elsewhere. Occasionally Gloria went to that room to look out the window, and for no other reason.

The sewing-room looked out on the yard of Gloria's house, and across the yard and across the contiguous yard was the rear of an old house which had been cut up into furnished apartments. It was nothing to look at. A woman in that house had a grand piano with a good tone, but her musical taste was precisely that of Roxy, the theatre fellow. In fact Gloria had a theory that this woman closely followed the Roxy programme, except when the programme called for Ravel's 'Bolero' and the César Franck and one or two others that Gloria and Roxy liked. The woman also sang. She was terrible. And this woman was the only human being Gloria identified with the house. On warm days she had seen that much of the woman that was between the shoulders and the knees. The woman did not close the window all the way down on hot days. She never had seen the woman's face, but only her torso. She had seen it in and out of clothes, and it was nothing to go out of your

'As it were.'

'And all the women would stop, see? They would watch this phenomenon and meanwhile traffic would be rolling by. There's only one difficulty. When the women get tired of watching it we'll have jaywalking again.'

'Ho-ho. Women -'

'I know. Women won't ever get tired of watching that phenomenon. This is a *nice* conversation.'

'What about men jaywalkers?' said Gloria.

'We have a jaywalker for a mayor,' said Eddie.

'Oh, stop it. That isn't even original.'

'Yes, it's at least original. It may be lousy, but it's original. Anyway I never heard anyone else say it. That's always my trouble when I make puns.'

'What else with your money?'

'Buy you lunch. Buy you a present. Buy Norma a present -'

'And get a haircut.'

Eddie was gay all through luncheon, long after Gloria grew tired of his fun. She could see that it was more than the prospect of the job that made him feel good. The other thing was without a doubt Norma Day. Always before this when he was gay it did not last so long without encouragement from Gloria; this time he went on, and in a way that in anyone else she would have called stupid. Not stupid in Eddie. Eddie did not do stupid things. And God knows he was entitled to some fun. But twice in one day was too much for this: first it was Ann Paul with her Mr Fletcher - Mr Henderson, rather. Ann was all packed and everything and moving right out of Gloria's life. And now Eddie. She could easily have said the hell with Ann. She didn't like women anyway. Women had no spine. Gloria thought they were more intelligent than men, but they didn't get as much out of it as men did. Unless trouble was getting something out of it. Now that Ann was safe and happy Gloria admitted to herself that what their schoolmates had suspected might easily have been true. It was nothing special against Ann. Gloria had a theory that there was a little of that in practically all women; just get them drunk enough in the right surroundings. And a lot of them didn't have to get drunk. She had had passes made at her by dressmakers' fitters, show girls, women doctors, and - and then she pulled herself out of this. For every woman who

'Jefferson Machamer,' she said.

'That's not the way to say it,' said Eddie, and hung up.

Eddie was full of plans, few of them making sense when his income was considered. All Gloria had to do was listen. 'A small car, an Austin or one of those little Jordans. You know those little Jordans? They don't make them any more, but they were some cars. Or I keep seeing an ad in the paper for a baby Peugeot. I just want a small car.'

'Naturally.'

'Why naturally?'

'So you won't have to take anyone else for a ride. You want a car to think in, don't you, Baby?'

'That's right,' he said. 'A car I can think in.'

'And Norma and I, we'll just sit around and sew on Sunday afternoons when it's hot. You go out to the country - the North Shore is nice and cool. You go out and you think and Norma and I will sit and wait for you, and then you come home and tell us what you've been thinking. Understand, if you don't *want* to tell us, or you're too tired, it'll keep. What else are you going to do with your money?'

'Well -' they were at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighth Street, halted by traffic. 'You see those figures on top of the traffic lights?' At that time the traffic light standards were adorned on top with gilt statuettes of semi-nude men in trench helmets.

'Uh-huh.'

'Well, I'm going to do something about them. I'm not sure what, but something.'

'Somebody ought to.'

'I may only buy them, all the way from here to a Hundred and Tenth Street, if they go that far, and send them to a silly old uncle of mine who loves to play with soldiers.'

'No.'

'No. You're right. I have a better idea, but I don't know you well enough to tell you.'

'Certainly not.'

'The idea is, how to control female jaywalkers. I would have instead of a light, when it is time for the red light to go on, all the little soldiers would uh, come to attention as it were.'

had made a pass at her there were ten, fifteen, a hundred, a thousand, who had not, and who probably had not the slightest inclination in that direction. But admitting that she was factually wrong did not get her out of the general mood. She came back to wishing Ann well, and found herself wanting to be away from Eddie. She was tired of being with him. The only person she wanted to be with was Liggett. She wanted to be home or with Liggett. One or the other. Away from the whole thing, all that was her usual life; Eddie, her friends, the smart places or the gay places, the language she and they spoke, and all about that life. But if she had to have any of it, she wanted all of it. Here, with the bright sun on Fifth Avenue, she was thinking that the only thing she wanted was to be with Liggett, lying in bed or on the floor or anywhere with him, drunk as hell, taking dope, doing anything he wanted, not caring about the time of day or the day of the week and not thinking whether it was going to end. And if not Liggett, then no one. Then she wanted to be home where she could be within sound of her mother's voice, surrounded by the furniture that she would not bump even in the dark. She wanted to be moral. She would stop smoking. She would wear plain clothes and no make-up. She would wear a proper brassière, no nail polish. She would get a job and keep regular hours. And she knew she could do these things, because she knew Liggett would be back. Maybe.

Eddie asked her to have more coffee but she said she had to go home and wait for a call. Like that Eddie understood. His gaiety disappeared, he was considerate, he remembered that she had not been participating in his fun. 'You go on home,' he said. 'I'm going uptown, and I'll take a bus from here.'

'I'm sorry, Eddie.'

'You're sorry? I'm the one to be sorry.'

'It just happens today -'

'I know. Go ahead. Kiss me good-bye.'

'No,' she said.

'All right, don't,' he said. But she did, and at least made the waiter glad.

She went home, feeling like crying part of the way, and then halfway changing to pleased with herself because she was on her way home, which was a path to righteousness or something.

Three o'clock was striking when she let herself in. Elsie, the

triplicate mirrors and many lights. Even the front of the drawer had a mirror, and whenever she noticed this she thought about the unknown person who designed the table, what he or she must have had in mind: what earthly use could there be for a mirror on a drawer, just that height? What *other* earthly use, that is? It reflected your body right where your legs begin. Did other women really look at themselves as much as she did or what? Yes, she guessed they did, and it was not an altogether unwelcome thought. She wanted to be like other women, now, for the time being. She didn't want to be the only one of her type in the world. She didn't want to be a marked girl, who couldn't get along with the rest of the world. It had started out a good day, and then came Ann, and her joy for Ann didn't hold over an hour; she was bored with Eddie, really her best friend; she fought an undignified fight with Elsie, and she had a quarrel with her mother. Why did days have to start right if they were going to turn out like this? Was it to give you a false sense of security, an angry God, a cruel God, making you feel this was going to be a lovely day, about as swell a little day as you could hope to find, and then - smacko! Four times she had gone smacko! So what about this stuff of starting the day feeling it was going to be a good one? Or maybe it was a merciful God who did it. He gave you a good night's sleep, thereby making you feel good at the beginning of the day, because He knew you were going to have a tough one and you'd need all the optimism you could command. What about God, for that matter? She hadn't thought about God for a long time. Monday she would begin again, because she noticed one thing about people who believed in God: they were warmer people than those who didn't. They had a worse time, but they had a better time too. Catholics. Catholics had more fun on parties than anyone else. The Broadway people were mostly all Catholics or Jews, and they seemed to have a good time. At least the Catholics did. As to the Jews, they never seemed to have a really good time. They were too busy showing off when they were supposed to be having a good time. Like Italians. Gloria at this point changed her classification from Catholic to Irish. The people that seemed to have the best time, at least so far as she had observed, were the Irish Catholics who didn't go to Church. Some of them would confess once a year and then they could start all over again. That didn't seem right. Gloria is

She sat there half dressed, too furious to curse Elsie, hating the Negro race, hating herself and her luck. In five minutes she called the number again. It was always possible he was in the bathroom the first time. This time she left word that she had called. 'Just say that Gloria phoned. The party will know.' She only hoped it was Liggett. She was sitting there and she heard the front door close in the careful but not noiseless way her mother closed it. Gloria called to her to come upstairs.

'Certainly is getting warmer. When did you get back? Is Eddie really working?'

'Mother, this is the last straw. I want you to fire Elsie. Today.'

'Why, what's she done?'

'I just had a very important message and she forgot to give it to me till just this minute, and of course when I called the party had left.'

'Well, you know Elsie has a lot to do. She's got this whole house -'

'You can get any number of niggers that will do twice the work and won't forget a simple little thing like that. I'm sick of her. She's lazy -'

'Oh, no. No, she isn't lazy. Elsie's a good worker. I admit she has her shortcomings, but she isn't lazy, Gloria.'

'She is! She's terrible, and I want you to fire her. I insist!'

'Oh, now don't fly off the handle this way over a simple little telephone message. If it's that important the person will call again, whoever it was. Who was it, and why is it so important?'

'It'd take too long to tell you now. I want you to fire Elsie, that's what I want you to do. If you don't I'll tell Uncle Bill. I won't stay here.'

'Now look here, just because Elsie does something bad isn't any reason why you should be rude to me. You have your own way quite a lot it seems to me. Too much for your own good. You go around doing as you please, staying away at night and doing dear knows what and we permit it because - well, I sometimes wonder why we do permit it. But you can't come home and disrupt the whole household because one little thing goes wrong. If you can't appreciate all the things we do, all for you -'

'I'm not going to listen to you.' She went to the bathroom and locked the door. In the bathroom was a dressing-table with

Chapter 9

THE *City of Essex* was built in the late 1870s, and though to this day she is a fairly sturdy craft, her designers were working to catch the custom of a public that was different from today's. Different in quite a few ways, the citizens of the Republic in the Rutherford Birchard Hayes administration were especially different from the Hoover citizens in regard to the sun. When the *City of Essex* was built, the American people, travelling on ocean-going and coastal steamers, liked to be in the shade, or at least did not feel like climbing from one deck to another just to get sunburned. Thus the *City of Essex* had a top deck that was little more than a roof for the dining-room. It had a sort of cat-walk around this roof, abaft the wheelhouse.

If they were putting that much money into a boat today they could have a place on the top deck where people could lie and sit in the sun when the weather was fine. They would of necessity have proper handrailing along the edge of the deck. The handrailing would be high enough and strong enough to withstand the usual wear and tear on handrailing.

The *City of Essex*, however, was built in the late 1870s, and no matter how amusing passengers might find the elaborate decorations and furnishings of the dining-room, they could not say much for the handrailing along the top deck of this old side-wheeler. That handrailing was too low; it was dangerous.

But one of the last things Weston Liggett was worrying about, two decks below the top deck, was the handrailing two decks above him. The big worry was whether Gloria was on board the *City of Essex*, and there were other lesser worries. He was a man who a week ago had a home and now had only a hotel room. He was insanely infatuated with a girl young enough to be his daughter (he would not call it love: he was too angry with her for that). He had reason to believe that the girl was aboard this old tub, but he was not absolutely sure. He was not positive. What was more, he did not want to take any step toward finding out. He did not want to do any of the things by which he could find out. He did not want to ask the purser (he did not want to have anything to do

were going to have a real religion, but it certainly made those Catholics feel good. She decided she wanted to go to a Catholic Church and confess. What a story that would be if she ever told the father all she could tell. The party she went to thinking it was being given by a movie actress and it turned out to be a gangster party, where they had all the girls from a show and the gangsters tied sheets to one girl's wrists and hung her stark naked out the twenty-first-floor window, and when they pulled her in they thought she was dead. All the girls getting stinking as fast as they could because they were afraid to stay sober and afraid to suggest leaving. The two virgins. The dwarf. The very young and toughest of the mob, who never even smiled unless he was hurting somebody. She remembered how frightened she was, because that young man kept staring at her, but the lawyer with whom she had gone to the party told the big shot that she was Park Avenue, and the big shot got enough kick out of thinking his party was shocking her. And it was. She had seen wild parties, but this was beyond wild: the cruelty was what made it stick in her memory. She looked around the bathroom and it made her think of Rome. Rome never saw parties like that. Rome didn't have electric light and champagne and the telephone, thirty-story apartment houses and the view of New York at night, saxophones and pianos. Here she was, just a girl on the town, but about the only thing she had missed was lions and Christians, and she supposed if she hung around long enough she'd have to see that. With an effort she made herself quit this line of thought. It was so real to her that she was sure her mother could hear her thinking. She opened the bathroom door. Her mother had left the bedroom.

She decided to go away. Alone. Think things out. She opened her desk drawer where she kept her money, and she counted more than thirty dollars. Where to on thirty dollars, without asking anyone for more? This place, that place, no, no, no. Then yes: at five-thirty she could take a boat to Massachusetts. The *City of Essex* was leaving at five-thirty. She had enough to go there and back, pay all her meals, tips, magazines. She would take a small overnight bag.

'Miss Glaw-ria, telephone.' Elsie from downstairs.

at the end of Gloria's block, and looking at his watch very big, so that anyone who saw him would think he had an appointment, he stood with his papers, one open, one folded and tucked under his arm. He did not have long to wait. Less than ten minutes after he - as he thought of it - took up his vigil, Gloria appeared, carrying a bag. He got out of her sight until she got into a taxi. Liggett got into a taxi across the street. He pretended to be undecided about where to go (as he certainly was until Gloria's cab got under way). Then noticing that her cab was turning into a one-way street he told his driver to go through that street until he made up his mind. His mind was made up for him. From one one-way street Gloria's cab went to another one-way street, west-bound as was the first. He followed her cab and watched her get out at the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Steamship Company pier. He kept his cab a few blocks longer, got out and took another cab to the M. & R.I. pier, having given Gloria time to get aboard. He knew enough about the M. & R.I. ships, because he had taken them many times when Emily would be spending summers with her family at Hyannisport. He knew that they never left on the dot of 5.30, and he could take the *City of Essex* at the last minute if he so chose. He did so choose, because at next to the last minute a thought came that almost made him give up today's chase: What if Gloria was going on a trip with some other man? Some cheap fellow, to be going on a trip of this kind. It was common and cheap. Worse than Atlantic City. He almost didn't go, but then he thought what the hell? If she wanted to do that, now would be the time to find it out, and if she didn't, it would be a swell opportunity to talk to her and get her to listen to reason about the coat and all the other things he wanted to discuss with her. He felt weak and impotent when he thought how much of his life depended on her consent. Just her consent. A whim, perhaps. She might say no now to something that next week she would say yes to. So much depended on her consent, and her consent depended so much on his approach. If he went at her threateningly she might tell him to go - himself, but if he went at it in the right way he might easily get her to agree to everything. And one of the things he was beginning to want very much to have her agree to was that she should sleep with him tonight. So when he came aboard the *City of Essex* his plan was to lie low and after dinner he would talk to her and propose -

with the purser, who was a round-shouldered man with a neatly trimmed moustache; thin, and with a way of holding his cigarette between the knuckles of his first two fingers that made you think right away of a man fast drying up who at one time had been a great guy with the women -- a man who would be nastily suspicious of any inquiry about a young woman, rather tall, well dressed, about twenty-two). He did not want to ask a steward or anyone else if such a young woman had come on board. Probably in the back of Liggett's mind all this and the preceding day had been a strong doubt that his marriage had busted up. The habit of married thinking does not break so soon, not if the marriage has had time to mean anything good or bad, and hence the precautions he had been taking: when he telephoned Gloria he did not leave his name, because he was not registered at the hotel under his real name, but under the name of Walter Little. He had made the reservation on the *City of Essex* under the name of Walter Little (the initials were the same as his own). When he tried to reach Gloria he had not left the phony name because he was afraid she would not call back any Walter Little. He had not left his own name because he was almost certain she would not call any Weston Liggett. And so, all the precautions before getting on the boat, and after boarding it. Aboard the *City of Essex* he did not, as he thought of it, wish to show his hand.

So far as anyone could be sure, he was sure that Gloria had no suspicion that he was aboard. She did not know where he was. He had been in his room when she phoned, but he had deliberately not answered. He had not called anyone else from the hotel, and it was therefore reasonable to suppose that any call would be from Gloria. He did not at first know why he had not answered, but the moment the phone stopped ringing he congratulated himself on a master-stroke. Gloria's phoning meant that she was home. It just possibly meant only that she had phoned her home to find out if there had been any messages for her, but that was unlikely. It was more likely that she was home when she phoned his room at the hotel. Acting on his hunches and as part of the master-stroke he took a cab to within a block of her house. He dismissed the cab. He was going to be patient. He had his mind made up that if Gloria was in that house he would wait ten hours if necessary until she came out. He bought a couple of afternoon papers at the newsstand

happened. He hoped she wasn't the kind that gets seasick on Long Island Sound.

On the *City of Essex* there is a narrow space of deck belting all the outside cabins except four on each side of the ship. On the starboard and on the port side are two sets of four cabins each which the reader must remember never to take when travelling in the *City of Essex*. These uncomfortable cabins are just forward of the housing that covers the side-wheels which propel the ship. Liggett had one of these cabins.

There was nothing to do but sit and look out the cabin window. The cabin was very narrow, and Liggett parked his arse on a little stool and put his forearms on the window sill and smoked cigarettes. He took off his coat and was more comfortable, and really it wasn't bad when you looked out the window. The *City of Essex* goes at a pretty good clip down the North River and up the East, under the bridges, past the (Liggett was on the port side) wasted municipal piers of the East River, the unheard-of tramp steamers docked north of the Brooklyn Bridge, and on up into the section from Mitchel Place north, occupied by Beekman and Sutton Place buildings which Liggett knew, inhabited by people he knew. He knew by the sound when he was near and under the Queenborough Bridge. There was so much hysterical noise of thousands of straphangers and motorists hurrying home to their hutches in Queens and Nassau counties. All the way up the river, and especially in the vicinity of Hell Gate Liggett kept thinking what a big job it is to be mayor of New York. All the dock employees, the cop on Exterior Street, the hospital people, the cops of the Marine Division, the people who worked on Welfare Island (which Liggett of course could not see), the hospital people on one island and the rat-fighters on another, the woman who had to live on a city-owned island because she spread typhoid fever, the men running the ferry-boats, the fellows making repairs under one of the bridges - there were enough of them to make up a good-sized (and probably very horrible-looking) city. And the only name they all knew was James J. Walker. Liggett wondered if Walker ever thought of that - and if he did was it a good thing for him to think of? Maybe he thought of it too often. It was too much of a job for one man. Liggett decided that the next time he saw Walker he would tell him he ought to have a rest (although Walker had just got back

feeling he had from loving Ruth did not last long. He remembered what he was to do on this boat.

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Gloria was hungry too. One more discomfort. The other was that ever since she had come aboard the *City of Essex* she had wanted to go to the bathroom, and she was afraid to go. She had used toilets in speakeasies where to breathe the air seemed pretty risky. But there was something intimate about a speakeasy in the family. No one who went to the same speakeasy as you did would be so mean as to give you something. That was almost the way she felt about speakeasy toilets; but she always took elaborate precautions anyway. But on this old boat everything was so *old*. The women's toilet (as distinguished from the ladies' room in a speakeasy, the johnny at school, the little girls' room at a party in an apartment, and the wash-my-hands on a train) was clean enough, and an elderly Negress was there to sell you safety pins. Gloria took one look, went into one of the toilets, and then came right out. The old Negress probably thought she was crazy, but this was not Gloria's day for caring what old or young Negresses thought. Finally, after failing altogether to win out by 'not thinking about it', she gave in, went to the bathroom, came back, and was ready for a fight or a frolic and a small steak.

She was working on the steak when a woman spoke to her. Gloria was alone at a table for two, the woman was alone at a table for four. 'Always a nice breeze on Long Island Sound, isn't there?' said the woman.

'Yes, isn't there?' said Gloria.

'It's my first ride on one of these boats, although ha ha I've been to Europe several times. But I wanted to take this ride to see what it was like.'

'Yes. Mm-hmm,' said Gloria.

'Just about what I expected. I wonder where we're off of right now do you suppose? Think we passed New Haven? Because I have friends live there. I'm from - I'll bet you didn't come as far as I did for this trip. You're a New Yorker, I can tell that, aren't you?'

'You can tell it to anyone you please,' was what Gloria wanted to say. 'Yes, New York,' was what she said.

himself that those fellows were married. He wasn't thinking much at all; because the sight of a boat speeding husbands homeward did not make him feel good. The next time he went home there would be strain even between the girls and himself. Emily, naturally you would expect it of her. But it would have communicated itself to the girls - if indeed Emily had not actually told them that their father would not be living at home any more. Ruth. The thing that made him kiss her hand in the station wagon. The way she had taken charge at the family luncheon. Oh, the things he wanted to do for her, the things he wanted to do with her. He realized that for a couple of years now he had been having the beginning of anticipation of the day when he would be able to take her out to dinner and the theatre and a night club, to boat races and football games. Probably there wouldn't be many times like that; she was a beautiful kid. 'Jesus, sometimes she takes your breath away,' he thought. Not beautiful in a conventional way. It was more in the eyes, the set of her chin when she was sitting quietly on a porch or in a corner, not knowing she was being watched. He guessed there were no new things that a father could feel about his daughter. But he guessed no father felt so deeply, little though he might show it. You couldn't show it much with Ruth. Kissing her hand like that on Sunday - it had just come over him, and he had done it, and he knew she liked it. That was good. Her liking it. She liked him better than she did Emily. No, but in a different way. And he liked her so much better than when she was a little kid. She got bigger, and your love got bigger. She was more completely a girl, a person, and your love was more complete. He wanted to be with her all the time she was pregnant, when she was having her first baby by the swell young guy she would marry. Not some older guy who had gone around and laid a lot of girls and was out of college five or ten years, but someone her own age. Like those two people in one of the Galsworthy novels, only they were cousins, weren't they? And they had to be careful not to have children. Ruth. Lovely, dear Ruth, that a father could love.

The tears were in his eyes and one or two out over the lower lid, and he became aware that he had not noticed it at first because dusk had come and darkness was coming. The light was gone. You were conscious of the curtains in the windows of the small yachts that the *City of Essex* passed. He was hungry. The clean

'Really? Why? Is it risqué?'

'Yes, a little.'

'Tell me. What is it? I won't be shocked.'

'Well,' said Gloria. 'Most of my friends, my *men* friends, they say, "I was stewed to the balls last night." My girl friends -'

'Really. I took you for a lady but I see I was wrong. Excuse me,' said the woman, and stood up and left the room.

'I didn't have to do that, but I guess I had to,' Gloria told herself. 'Now I'd like a drink, and isn't it nice? I won't be able to get one.' She smoked a cigarette, hoping the strange woman would come back and think she looked funny. She went out on deck, and on the radio on deck the Connecticut Yankees were plugging Mr Vallée's recording of 'The Wind in the Willows'. The air was pretty good. There was no moon.

This was one of Gloria's nights for not looking at men. At a party or at a ball, in a railroad station or a public speakeasy, on the street, at a football game, Gloria always did one of two things about the matter of looking at men. She either did one or the other: she either got the eye of a stranger and stared him down, giving him a complete and unmistakable going over the way few American men have the nerve to do with American women; or else she all but did what they call in the movies 'fig bar'. Fig bar is a term which covers the whole attitude of the very bashful child; the toes turned in, eyes lowered, and especially the finger in the mouth. Gloria could be bashful when she wanted to, and she frequently wanted to. She never got over her real terror of a strange crowd. She could not recall a time when this was not true. It was true of her as a child, and on one occasion it had made her do something she never got over regretting. It was at a party, and it was that she had stayed with a man with four other people looking on; two men, two women. The other women wanted to do it, and did, but Gloria was the first. It was one of the few times in her life that she did something that made her repeatedly ask why she had done it. When she discovered that the reason probably was that she was showing off more intensely than ever before, and that the reason for wanting to show off was this unconquerable shyness - it didn't make the whole thing any better. She was glad when one of the women who had seen it, a second-string movie actress, died. That made one less person who had seen it. She wished the others would

'Want to come over and sit at my table? There isn't anyone else sitting here, and we're the only ladies travelling by ourselves I notice.'

'Well - do you mind if I finish my steak? It'd be so much trouble to move now. But thank you. I'll have dessert with you if I may.' She wished she had what some girls had: the ability to get rid of bores, instead of talking nervously and not thinking what she was saying. She didn't want to have dessert with this schoolteacher or whatever she was.

'Then I'll come over to your table. I'm all finished eating, but I'd like to have a cigarette, only I hate to light one here when I'm sitting by myself. It looks funny. Yih know? When yih see a woman eating by herself smoking in a public restrunt. Where are you from? Oh, you did tell me, New York. Tsih. I want to go to New York for a real stay some time. I'm always going some place when I go to New York, on my way to Europe or else home after being to Europe. Oh, did I burn you?' Hot sulphur from the woman's match was scratched loose and stung Gloria's wrist. 'Here, let me have a look. . . . No, it's all right. It may burn a little. I'd put something on it if I were you. Awful the way they make these matches. I suppose that Ivan what's his name made these. The match king, from Denmark. No, Sweden. Do you see that man over there with the cigar? That's the reason why I wanted to sit with somebody. He's drunk.'

'He *looks* sober,' said Gloria.

'Not, though. Drunk as a coot. Tight as a tick.'

'Tight as a tick. Did you make that up? Just now?' said Gloria.

'Oh, no. Why, we say that all the time at home. Tight as a tick? Didn't you ever say that?'

'Never heard it before in my life. What does it mean? What is a tick?'

'Well, I've always wondered that too, but I guess it must be something tight. It couldn't mean the tick of a watch, because I don't see anything tight about the tick of a watch. What do they say in your crowd when someone is three sheets to the wind?'

'I have no crowd.'

'Well - I mean, your friends. What do they say when someone is under the weather?'

'Oh,' said Gloria. 'Well, I don't think you'd like what they say.'

telling him well, then for Christ's sake bring *hot* soup and be quick about it, and the Negro whining that cole soop want his faul, chef to blame for cole soop and anyway looka what time tis. Liggett was pretty well pleased with the way he had handled the situation, not snitching to the headwaiter.

Abruptly, he stood up. The headwaiter rushed over to him. 'Anything wrong, sir?'

'I don't feel well. I think I'd better have some air.' He didn't feel sick but he certainly didn't want to eat his dinner. 'Never mind the dinner.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said the headwaiter.

'T's all right,' said Liggett.

He went up on deck again and Gloria was not in her chair. She was standing at the rail on the port side. It was noticeably colder and the only other people on deck were an Italian-American and his wife and two children, the Italian trying to get his money's worth of sea air, and the sleepy wife and children looking up to him for the signal to go to bed.

'Hello,' said Liggett.

Gloria turned to give him cold stare Number 25, but said: 'Good God!'

'I'm quite a stranger,' said Liggett. 'I'll say it for you.'

'I wasn't going to say that. What - how did you happen to be on this boat?'

'You don't think I just happened to be on board, do you?'

'No, but how did you know I was going to be on this boat?'

'I followed you.'

'Ooh. What a cheap trick. Followed me.'

'Well, I had to see you.'

'You didn't have to follow me. You could have called me again.'

'Then I'd have missed you. You left your house a short time after you got my message.'

'It was your message. I thought it was.'

'Yes, it was my message. Do you want to sit down?'

'Not particularly.'

'I do.'

'I'd rather stand. Aren't you afraid people will know you?'

'Who, for instance? Those Italians? They look like friends of mine?'

die, too. But she did not wish it very strongly, because she knew that the other woman, not the actress, probably wished Gloria dead too. And it did nothing to cure her shyness. It only made it worse. Sometimes just as she was about to enter a bar she would remember the time – and she could hardly force herself to enter the bar. Other times she would be passing a row of tables and she would hate her evening gown for the very things that had influenced her selection of it: its décolleté, the way it fitted over the hips. Full well she knew the movement of her own hips as she walked, as though each hip were a fist, clenching and unclenching, and the rhythm locked forever, reminding her of a metronome. She knew, because she had watched other girls. A girl walks across a room, her hips going *tick-tock tick-tock*. The girl becomes self-conscious and stops at a table, interrupting the rhythm with the hip resting on *tick*; but when she resumes her walk, *tock* goes the other hip, and *tick-tock*.

It was dark on deck and on Long Island Sound. The thin bars of light on Long Island and Connecticut shore were better light than the cheap lamps on deck. Gloria told the steward to put a chair in the middle of the deck for her. She did not notice anyone.

Thus she did not see Liggett, who was leaning against the rail on the starboard side, looking at Long Island and being honest with himself in that he was guessing, and guessing only, the position of the *City of Essex*. When he heard Gloria's heels on deck he tightened up. He knew the sound for the sound of a girl's shoes. He turned and saw that she did not look in his direction. He watched a steward put a chair down for her. He left and went to the dining-room.

The Negro waiter was none too pleasant about giving him something to eat, as it was past the dinner hour, but Liggett was not in a mood for humouring waiters. When the Negro brought the soup Liggett said: 'Take that back. It's cold.' He knew the Negro was making a face at him and when he began to mumble Liggett looked up and said: 'What?' so quickly that you could hardly hear the *t*. All aspirate. Then the white headwaiter came over and asked if there was anything wrong, and Liggett said no, thank you. The Negro picked up the plate and the headwaiter followed, obviously asking him what the hell was going on. The Negro answering the man said the soup was cold, the headwaiter

Or rather - I don't know how to put it. Technically I *have* left my wife -'

'Permanently?'

'Permanently? Why, yes. Of course permanently.'

'Of course permanently,' she repeated. 'As a matter of fact you don't know whether it's permanently or not. I can tell by your tone, you haven't even thought about that phase of it.'

'No, I guess I haven't figured it out by months and days and years. Are you cold?'

'Yes. But we'll stay here.'

'You don't have to be nasty about it. I merely asked.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Well, to get back to the subject. My wife and I have split up. Permanently. I told her about you -'

'Why did you do that?'

'I didn't mention your name.'

'That isn't what I meant. Why did you tell her before you told me?'

'I didn't have much chance to tell you, remember.'

'Even so you should have told me. You should have waited. What did you do that for? I'm not a home-wrecker. You have children. It's the worst kind of luck to break up a home. You should have told me first.'

'I don't see what difference that would have made. It had nothing to do with the facts.'

'What facts? You mean my sleeping with you? Did you tell her I slept with you in your apartment? Did you?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, you fool. You awful fool. Oh. Oh. Oh, Liggett. Why did you do that? You poor man. Ah, kiss me.'

He kissed her. She put her hand on the back of his neck. 'What else did you do? What else did you tell her?' she said.

'I told her everything except your name.'

'What did she say?'

'Well, I didn't give her much chance to say anything. I told her I loved you.'

'Yes. And didn't she ask you my name? No, she wouldn't want to know that. She'll find out soon enough, I suppose.'

'You never can tell.'

'Anyway, there they go,' said Liggett. 'Now listen to me for five minutes, will you please?'

'I'll sit down now. I'm weak.'

'Why?'

'Well, the way you suddenly appear.'

'Been on the boat since five-thirty.'

'You kill me.'

'Here. Do you want to sit here?' he said. 'Now look here -'

'Oh, no, thanks. I don't want any of those now look here discussions.'

'I'm sorry. How shall I begin?'

'Are you all right? I mean after the fight? I thought you'd be hurt pretty badly.'

'I may have a rib kicked loose.'

'Well, don't fool around with that, then. I knew a boy had a rib kicked loose in football and finally it punctured his lung.'

'You wouldn't want that to happen to me, would you?'

'No. Whether you believe it or not, I wouldn't.'

'Why not? Simple humanitarian instincts or what?'

'No. Better than that. Or worse.'

'What?'

'I love you.'

'Aw-haw. That's a laugh.'

'I know.'

'What makes you think you love me?'

'I don't know. Nothing makes me think I love you. It's closer than that. It isn't as far away from me as something making me think I love you. It's knowing that I do love you. I don't expect you to believe it, but it's true.'

'I beg your pardon. Have a cigarette.'

'Oh, bow nice. American cigarettes. There's a big fine if you're caught smuggling them into Massachusetts.'

'Don't kid.'

'All right.'

He reached for her hand, but she would not let him hold it. 'No. You wanted to talk. Talk, then.'

'All right,' he said. 'Well, in the first place, I've left my wife.'

'To you, yes, but -'

'There are no buts. If you want to, we will. There isn't any other consideration.'

'On the contrary, there are thousands of other considerations, but they don't matter.'

'That's what I meant.'

'No, it isn't. But we won't argue the point. Yes, I'll marry you. You get the divorce fixed up and all that and I'll marry you and I'll be a good wife, too.'

'I know you will.'

'Oh, not for the reason you think. You think because I've been around like a man and I'm ready to settle down. That's not the real reason why I'll be a good wife.'

'Isn't it?'

'Absolutely not. Do you want to know the real reason? Because it's born in me. My mother. I was thinking today what a wonderful wife she was to my father, and still is after all these years. In a way, of course you're right. Living the kind of life I've led then finding out that there's only one life for a woman. I know you'd rather not have me mention the kind of life I've led, but I can't just pretend it never existed.'

'Where's your stateroom?'

'It's on my key. Where's yours? I'd rather go to yours.'

He told her how to get to his. 'I'll go down now,' he said.

'I'll be down in five minutes,' she said.

In his stateroom he thought what an awful place it was to bring her to. Then when she knocked on his door he was embarrassed some more. He sat on the lower berth and she faced him and he put his arms around her at the hips. Here she was, just under her clothes, standing with her hands holding the upper berth and ready for anything he wanted.

'No!' she said.

'What?'

'I don't want you to,' she said.

'You will,' he said. 'Sit down.'

'No, darling.' She sat down on the berth beside him.

'What's the matter?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'Yes, you do. What is it?'

'I didn't want to tell her your name. I wouldn't have if she'd asked me.'

'She wouldn't be in any hurry to know that now. What are her plans?'

'I'm not sure. I told her I'd give her a divorce in New York if she wanted it. I'd give her grounds.'

Gloria laughed. 'You already have.'

'That's exactly what she said.'

'Is she going to accept your kind offer?'

'I think she plans to go to Reno.'

'Why go to all that expense? Get her to get one in New York. I'll be the unidentified woman in the lace negligée.'

'No. Reno's better.'

'It's expensive. It costs a lot of money to go to Reno, so I'm told.'

'But I think she wants to go to Reno, so whatever she wants to do is all right with me, except we'll have to have some arrangement about my seeing the children.'

'How old are they?'

'Ruth, the older one, she's going on sixteen, or maybe she is sixteen, and the younger one, Barbara, she's two years younger.'

'Yes, I remember now. You did tell me. But that's not so good. Isn't the older one going to have a coming-out party?'

'I doubt it like hell. Those things cost. Two years ago, yes. But not this year, or next year.'

'Next year we're going to have a revolution.'

'Where do you get that kind of talk? Revolution. In this country? We might have a Democrat president, but - or is that what you mean by revolution.'

'I mean bloody revolution. Heads on staffs or staves or whatever you call them. Pikes. Your head, for instance. All the rich. Your head and a straw hat with a Racquet Club band on it. That's the way they're going to tell which heads to cut off. Dekes, Psi U's, Racquet Club, Squadron A.'

'Will you marry me?' he said.

'I was trying to get your mind off that. You don't have to feel you're bound to ask me that.'

'It's pretty obvious that I'm not doing this because I have to. It's because I want to. Do you *want* to get married?'

The sounds that the boat made muffled the heavy thump of his feet on the deck. That was the only way he knew how noisy the boat was. Ordinarily he made a lot of noise walking, but the big pistons that turned the side wheels, and the wheels themselves, and the nose of the *City of Essex* pushing into the water, and the rather stiff offshore breeze ~ it wasn't sail, 'Jeep,' he said, when he meant to say Gee. The breeze filled his mouth and made him gulp.

One deck, two decks, and no Gloria. He saw a sign hanging from a cord, Passengers Not Allowed on Top Deck After 8 p.m. That's where she would be.

He climbed over the cord and the sign and walked slowly up the stairs. There was no need to proceed quietly. Apparently every passenger had gone to bed and it was Liggett's guess that no deck-hand would be at work on the *City of Essex* at this hour.

At the top of the steps he could see only the outline of the wheel house, and the *City of Essex's* single stack and some ventilators. There was one short string of light on the shore, and it was all dark otherwise. Then he saw Gloria, he guessed it was Gloria, sitting on the dining-saloon roof. She turned at that moment and saw him, her eyes having become better accustomed to the darkness. She got up and ran forward. Then she stopped and looked around.

'Oh, all right,' he called, and turned and started down the stairway. Half way down he heard a scream, or thought he heard a scream. He ran down the few remaining steps, and this time he knew he heard a scream. He looked down at the water just in time to see Gloria getting sucked in by the side wheel. Then the boat stopped.

'There was nothing I could do,' said Liggett to nobody.

Chapter 10

THERE is not much room between the blades of the side wheels and the housing that covers each wheel. It was half an hour before they got what was left of Gloria out from between the blade and the housing, and nobody wanted to do it then. If she had fallen overboard abaft the housing she would have been shot away from

She looked half way around the tiny stateroom and then brought her head back to looking straight ahead.

'Oh,' he said. 'But it won't always be like this.'

'But I don't want it ever to be like this, ever again. Not even now.'

'Then we can go to your room,' he said.

'No. It isn't much better. It's bigger, but not better. It's still a dirty little stateroom on the *City of Essex*.'

'Only for tonight,' he said. 'I want you so much. I love you, Gloria.'

'Yes, and I love you even more. Ah, no. Look. Look at that bed. Those sheets. They weight a ton. Damp. Cold. And we can't both stand up at the same time in this room. Oh, the whole thing. Like a travelling salesman and his chippy.'

'You're no chippy, and I'm not a travelling salesman. We're as good as married now. Signing a lot of papers won't make us more so.'

'Yes, it will. Not signing the papers, but what the papers imply will. I'm going up to get some air and then to my room. Do you want to come along?'

'To your room?'

'No. On deck. I won't stay with you tonight, on this boat. If you don't want to come with me, all right, darling. I'll see you in the morning. When we get off the boat we can go to a hotel and I'll go right to bed with you. But not here.'

'Mm.'

'It isn't scruples. You know that. It's just so God-damned -'

'Cheap and vulgar, I suppose. You're a fine one to talk.'

'I know. That's just it. Good night. If you don't want to see me in the morning, all right. Good night.'

He did not answer, and she left. He sat there, hating her for a moment, for the truth was he wanted her in this room almost as much as he wanted her at all. The very smallness of the room would make it good, like being in a box. It would be new.

And then he began to see what she meant. He was sorry for what he had said (but knew he could make it up). What he wanted to do was to see her before she went to bed, tell her he was sorry, and tell her she was right about the room. She was no common tart, and she had a right to object to lying on his bed. He put on his vest and coat and left the room.

Parker. It was a hell of a thing. A young girl. Probably in the family way. The thought never crossed his mind that it was anything but suicide. A young girl, maybe eighteen, maybe twenty-one, according to the stewardess, who came on board alone, ate alone, according to the chief steward (who remembered her come to think of it, after hearing the stewardess describe her; and was corroborated by the purser), and was not seen talking to anyone. Captain Parker had to make a complete report for the owners and for the port authorities in New York and Massachusetts. Some assistant district attorney that wanted to get his name in the paper probably would be down snooping around and trying to make something of it. But here was one case of premeditated suicide and no two ways about it. It was too bad she didn't jump off the stern, but if you wanted to die that much it probably didn't make much difference which way you did it. Captain Parker hoped for her sake she got one on the skull when she was drawn in, otherwise it was a terrible death, judging from the looks of her. A terrible death. Well, girls got themselves in the family way these days irregardless of all the ways they had now that they didn't use to have to keep from getting that way. Captain Parker wondered whether he ought to say the Lord's Prayer over the body, but he looked around at his officers and men, and no, no Lord's Prayer in front of them. Fanchette, one of the A.B.s, from Pawtucket, had crossed himself when he saw the body. That was enough. If the girl's family wanted to, they could have a service and all the prayers they wanted.

The *City of Essex* resumed her trip, and the next morning in port the passengers were asked to give their names and addresses before leaving the ship. Otherwise to most of the passengers the trip was as usual, and many left the boat unaware of what had occurred. Liggett had one awful moment when he almost forgot to write Walter Little instead of his real name. He took a taxi from the pier to the railroad station and from there took the first train to New York.

the *City of Essex* by the force of the wheel, but where she fell was just forward of the housing, and there is a tremendous suck there. The *City of Essex* is always pulling in floating timber and dead dogs and orange peel, and sometimes when the wheel makes its turn the stuff is kicked out again. Sometimes not. The men in the wheel-house heard the second scream and signalled to stop. By that time Gloria was caught by the blades and was pulled up into the housing, counter-clockwise, in one long crush. She probably was killed the first time a blade batted her on the skull, by the same blade that pulled her up into the housing. There was no place in her body where there was a length of bone unbroken more than five inches. One A.B. fainted when he saw what he was going to have to do. The captain of the *City of Essex*, Anthony W. Parker, had only seen one thing like it before in his life, and that was a man in the black gang of the old *Erma* when the *Erma's* boiler burst off Nantucket in 1911. Captain Parker directed the removal of the woman's body from the wheel. He and two A.B.s entered the housing from inside the boat. The A.B.s carried an ordinary army blanket. One of the A.B.s accepted a slug of brandy from the captain's flask; the other man was going to take one, but he decided he could work better without it. They put the blanket over the body first, then gently rolled the body over and into the blanket. Captain Parker helped them carry the body inside the hull. 'Go on back and see if you can find the other hand,' said Captain Parker. 'She may have been wearing a ring. Have to find out who she is.' The search for the other hand was unsuccessful.

'Keep that covered up,' said Captain Parker, when the blanket fell open. 'Go on back with you,' he said, to the engine room crew who had collected.

The chief steward was called and he sent for one of the stewardesses, a middle-aged Negress. She screamed and was hard to manage, and it took five minutes for them to persuade her to examine just the girl's clothing, which they showed her by lifting a corner of the blanket. It took ten more minutes to get some answer out of her, and then she said yes, she recognized the dress, and gave the number of Gloria's stateroom. The captain sent someone there, and the someone returned, saying it must be her, her bed hadn't been slept in and the room didn't look occupied.

'She only come aboard to do the Dutch act,' said Captain

that he was leaning forward in his seat so that the train would hurry and he could spill it all to Emily.

Now there was Emily. Always before there had been Emily and always would be. He thought away from that, the way on a train you think away from things. A good thought comes and is the big thing in your mind, but it sticks there and the click of the car wheels over the joints, especially on lines that use go-pound and other light rail, lulls you to sleep with your eyes open, the thought sticking in your mind, then forgotten, supplanted by another thought.

Thus the thought of Emily, giving way to the thought of what happened last night. He could see it all, including what he had missed. When Gloria ran and he called to her, he believed she could hear his voice, the angry tone, but not the words; and so she ran again when he called, 'Oh, all right.' She was headed for the stairway on the port side, behind the wheel house but pretty far forward, hoping to get away from him by running down the stairs. But in the darkness and on account of the motion of the ship she ran smack into the rail, which is extremely low on the top deck of the *City of Essex*. She most likely hit the rail just below or just about at her knees. The forward throw of the upper part of her body - and she fell into the water. The scream, and then the second scream, and he knew he could not save her, knew it the fraction of a second after he comprehended what was happening. Well, he could have died with her.

He would tell it all to Emily. Yes, he knew he was afraid not to tell her. If she told him to go to the police and tell what happened, he would do it. But he would not tell them without being told to do it. Yes, he knew he hoped she would tell him not to go to the police.

At Grand Central he went through the passage and up the steps to the Biltmore, got his key, went to his room, came down and paid his bill. Back to the Grand Central, he gave the bag to a Red Cap (he did not want anyone to see him carrying it). He told the Red Cap to check the bag and bring him the check. He bought the afternoon papers. The story was on the front pages of the *Journal* and the *Telegram* - the *World-Telegram*, they were calling it now, and it looked like something they got out during a printer's strike. There was nothing in the *Evening Post*, the paper Emily read. The

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I set some sort of a record getting to her place, leaving behind me a stream of swearing-mad cab drivers who had tried to hog the road and got bumped over to the side for their pains.

A guy had his key in the downstairs door so I didn't have to ring the bell to get in. I didn't have to ring the upstairs bell either, because the door was open and when Connie heard me in the hall she shouted for me to come right in.

I threw my hat on the chair, standing in the dull light of the hall a moment to see where I was. Only a little night light was on, but a long finger of bright light streamed from the bedroom door out across the living-room. I picked my way round the furniture and called, 'Connie?'

'In here, Mike.'

She was in bed with a couple of pillows behind her back reading a book. 'Kind of early for this sort of thing, isn't it?'

'Maybe, but I'm *not* going out?' She grinned and wiggled under the cover. 'Come over here and sit down. You can tell me all your troubles.' She patted the edge of the bed.

I sat down and she put her fingers under mine. I didn't have to tell her something bad had happened. She could read it in my eyes. Her smile disappeared into a frown. 'What is it, Mike?'

'Jean Trotter . . . she was murdered tonight. She was killed and thrown off the bridge. It was supposed to look like suicide, but it was seen.'

'No!'

'Yes.'

'God, when is this going to stop, Mike? Poor Jean! . . .'

'It'll stop when we have the killer and not before. What do you know about her, Connie? What was she like, . . . who was this guy she married?'

Connie shook her head, her hair falling loosely around her shoulders. 'Jean . . . she was a sweet kid when I first met her. I—I don't know too much about her, really. She was older than the teen-age group, of course; but she modelled clothes for them. We . . . never did the same type of work, so I don't know about that.'

'Men . . . what men did she go with? Ever see them?'

'No, I didn't. When she first came to work I heard that she was engaged to a West Point cadet, then something happened. She was pretty broken up for a while. Juno made her take a vacation and when she came back she seemed to be all right, though she didn't take much interest in men. One time at an office party she and I were talking about what wolves some men are and she was all for hanging every man by his thumbs and making it a woman's world.'

jammed my foot on the starter and roared away from the kerb. Pat looked at the picture again in the light of the dash. His breath was coming fast. 'We can make it official now. I'll get the whole department on it if I have to. Give me a week and we'll have that guy ready to face a murder trial.'

I glowered back at him. 'Week, hell!—all we have is a couple of hours. Did you trace that piece of fabric I gave you?'

'Sure, we traced it all right. We found the store it came from . . . over a year ago. It was from a damn good suit the owner remembered selling, but the guy had no recollection for faces. It was a cash transaction and he didn't have a record of the size or any names and addresses. Our killer is one smart Joe.'

'He'll trip up. They all do.'

I cut in and out of the traffic, my foot heavy on the accelerator. On the main drag I was lucky enough to make the lights and didn't have to stop until I was in front of the Municipal Building. I said, 'Pat, use your badge and check the marriage bureau for Jean Trotter's certificate. Find out who she eloped with and where she was married. Since I can't show my nose you'll have to do this on your own.'

He started out of the car and I handed him the photograph. 'Take this along in case you have to brighten up a memory or two.'

'Where'll you be?'

I looked at my watch. 'First I'm going to see what I can get on the girl myself. Then I'm going to stop a seduction scene before it starts.'

Pat was still trying to figure that one out when I drove off. I looked in the rear-vision mirror and saw him pocket the photograph and walk away up the street.

I stopped at the first drugstore I came to and had a quarter changed into nickels, then pushed a guy out of the way who was getting into the booth. He was going to argue about it until he saw my face then he changed his mind and went looking for another phone. I dropped the coin in and dialled Juno's number. I was over-anxious and got the wrong number. The second time I hit it right, but I didn't get to speak to Juno. Her phone was connected to one of those service outfits that take messages and a girl told me that Miss Reeves was out, but expected home shortly. I said no. I didn't want to leave a message and hung up.

I threw in another nickel and spun the dial. Connie was home. She would be glad to see me no matter what the hour was. My voice had a rasp to it and she said, 'Anything wrong, Mike?'

'Plenty. I'll tell you about it when I get there.'

When I went back to pawing through the folder she let the coat clip open and I had to turn my back and sit down. Connie laughed; but I found the clipping.

Her name had been Julia Travesky. By order of the court she was now legally Jean Trotter. Her address was given at a small hotel for women in an uptown section. I stuffed the clipping in my wallet and put the folder in the dresser drawer. 'At least it's something,' I said. 'We can find out the rest from the court records.'

'What are you looking for, Mike?'

'Anything that will tell me why she was important enough to kill.'

'I was thinking . . .'

'Yeah?'

'There are files down at the office. Whenever a girl applies for work at the agency she has to leave her history and a lot of sample photos and press clippings. Maybe Jean's are still there.'

I whistled through my teeth and nodded. 'You've got something, Connie. I called Juno before I came up, but she wasn't home. How about Anton Lipsek?'

Connie snorted and pulled the coat back to bare her legs a little more. 'That drip is probably still sleeping off the drunk he worked up last night. He and Marion Lester got crocked to the ears and they took off for Anton's place with some people from the Inn about three o'clock in the morning. Neither of them showed up for work today. Juno didn't say much, but she was plenty burned up.'

'Nuts! Who else might have the keys to the place, then?'

'Oh, I can get in. I had to once before when I left my pocket-book in the office. I kissed the janitor's bald head and he handed over his passkey.'

The hands of my watch was going around too fast. My insides were beginning to turn into a hard fuzzy ball again. 'Do me a favour, Connie. Go up and see if you can get that file on her. Get it and come right back here. I have something to do in the meanwhile and you'll be helping out a lot if you can manage it.'

'No,' she pouted.

'Cripes, Connie, use your head! I told you . . .'

'Go with me.'

'I can't.'

The pout turned into a grin and she peeked at me under her eyelashes. She stood up, put a cigarette between her lips, and in a pose as completely normal as if she had on an evening gown, she pushed back the coat and rested her hands on her hips and swayed over until she was looking up into my face.

'Nice attitude. What changed her?'

'Now you've got me. We sort of lived in different parts of the world and I never saw too much of her. I know she had a good sum of money tied up in expensive jewellery she used to wear and there was talk about a wealthy student in an upstate college taking her out, but I never inquired about it. As a matter of fact, I was very surprised when she eloped like that. True love is funny, isn't it, Mike?'

'Not so funny.'

'No, I guess not.'

I put my face in my hand, rubbing my head to make things come out all right. 'Is that all . . . everything you know about her? Do you know where she was from or anything about her background?'

Connie squinted at the light and raised her forefinger thoughtfully. 'Oh! . . . I think . . .'

'Come on, come on . . . what?'

'I just happened to think. Jean Trotter wasn't her right name. She had a long Polish name and changed it when she became a model. She even made it legal and I cut the piece out of the paper that carried a notation about it. Mike . . . over there in the dresser is a small leather folder. Go get it for me.'

I slid off the bed and started through the top drawer until Connie said, 'No . . . the other one, Mike.'

I tried that one, too, but couldn't find it. 'Damn it, Connie, come over here and get it, will you!'

'I can't.' She laughed nervously.

So I started tossing all her junk to the floor until she yipped and threw back the covers to run over and make me stop. Now I knew why she didn't want to get out of bed. She was as naked as a jaybird.

She found the folder in the back of a drawer and handed it to me with a scowl. 'You ought to have the decency to close your eyes, at least.'

'Hell, I like you like that.'

'Then do something about it.'

I tried to look through the folder, but my eyes wouldn't stand still. 'For Pete's sake, put something on, will you!'

She put her hands on her hips and leaned towards me, her tongue sticking out. Then she turned slowly, with all the sultry motion she could command, and walked to the clothes closet. She pulled out her fur coat and slipped into it, holding it closed around her middle. 'I'll teach you,' she said. Then she sat in a low boudoir chair with her legs crossed, making it plain that I could look and be tempted, but that was all, brother, that was all.

try to stop me. You've never really let me do anything before and I know how important this is. Please, Mike ...'

'Velda, listen to me.' I tried to keep my voice calm. 'It isn't a stall. One of the agency girls was murdered tonight. Things are tying up. Her name was Jean Trotter ... before that she was Julia Travesky. The killer got her and ...'

'Who?'

'Jean ... Julia Travesky.'

'Mike ... that was the girl Chester Wheeler told his wife he had met in New York. The one who was his daughter's old school chum.'

'What!'

'You remember. I spoke of it after I came back from Columbus.'

My throat got dry all of a sudden. It was an effort to speak.

'Velda, for God's sake, don't go up there tonight. Wait ... wait just a little while,' I croaked.

'No.'

'Velda ...'

'I said no, Mike. I'm going. The police were here earlier. They were looking for you. They want you for murder.'

I think I groaned. I couldn't get the words out.

'If they find you we won't have a chance, Mike. You'll go behind bars and I couldn't stand that.'

'I know all about that, Velda. I was with Pat tonight. He told me. What do I have to do—get on my knees? ...'

'Mike! ...'

I couldn't fight the purpose in her voice. Good Lord, she thought she was helping me and I couldn't tell her differently! She thought I was trying to protect her and she was going ahead at all costs! Oh, Lord, think of a way to stop her, I couldn't! She said, 'Please don't bother to come up, Mike. I'll be gone, and besides, there are policemen watching this building. Don't make it any harder for me, please.'

She hung up on me. Just like that. Damn it, she hung up and left me cooped up in that two-by-four booth staring at an inanimate piece of equipment. I slammed the receiver back in the hook and ran past the guy who held the pull cord of the light in his hand, ready to turn it out. Lights out. Lights out for me too.

I ran back to the car and started it up. Time. Damn it, how much time? Pat said give him a week. A while ago I needed hours. Now minutes counted. Minutes I couldn't spare just when things were beginning to make sense. Jean Trotter ... she was the one Wheeler met at that dinner meeting. She was the one he went out with. But Jean eloped and got out of the picture very conveniently and Marion Lester took over the

I had never seen anything so unnaturally inviting in all my life.

'Go with me,' she said, 'then we'll come back together.'

I said, 'Come here, you,' and grabbed her as naked as she was and squeezed her against my chest until her mouth opened. Then I kissed her good. So good she stopped breathing for long seconds and her eyes were glazed.

'Now do what I told you to do or you'll get the hell slapped out of your hide,' I said.

She lowered her eyes and covered herself up with the coat. The grin she tried so hard to hide slipped out anyway. 'You're the boss, Mike. Any time you want to be my boss, don't tell me. I'll know it all by myself.'

I put my thumb under her chin and lifted her face up. 'There ought to be more people in this world like you, kid.'

'You're an ugly so-and-so, Mike. You're big and rough just like my brothers and I love you ten times as much.'

I was going to kiss her again and she saw it coming. She shed that coat and flew into my arms and let her body scorch mine. I had to shove her away when it was the one thing I didn't want to do, because it reminded me that soon something like this might be happening to Velda and I couldn't let it happen.

The thought scared the hell out of me. It scared me right down to my shoes and I was damning the ground Clyde walked on. I practically ran out of the apartment and stumbled down the stairs in my haste. I ran to the corner and into a candy store where the owner was just turning out the lights. I was in the phone-booth before he could tell me the place was closed and my fingers could hardly hold the nickel to drop it in the slot.

Maybe there was still time, I thought. God, there had to be time. Minutes and seconds, what made them so important? Little fractions of eternity that could make life worth living. I dialled Velda's number and heard it ring. It rang a long time and no one answered, so I let it go on ringing and ringing and ringing. It rang for a year before she answered it. I said it was me and she wanted to hang up. I shouted, and she held it, and cautiously, asked me where I was.

I said, 'I'm nowhere near your place, Velda, so don't worry about me pulling anything funny. Look, hold everything. Don't go up there tonight . . . there's no need to now. I think we have the thing by the tail.'

Velda's voice was soft, but so firm, so goddamn firm I could have screamed. She said, 'No, Mike. Don't try to stop me. I know you'll think of every excuse you can, but please don't

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I TRIED hard to locate Pat. I tried until my nickels were spent and there wasn't any place else to try. He was out chasing a name that didn't matter any more and I couldn't find him at the time when I needed him most. I left messages for him to either stay in his office or go home until I called him and they promised to tell him when, and if, he came in. My shirt was soaked through with cold sweat when I got finished.

The sky had loosened up again and was letting more flakes of snow sift down. Great. Just great. More minutes wasted getting around. I checked the time and swore some big curses then climbed in the car and turned north into traffic. Jean Trotter and Wheeler. It all came back to Wheeler after all. The two were murdered for the same reason. Why . . . because he saw and recognized her as an old friend? Was it something he knew about her that made him worth killing. Was it something she knew about him?

There was blackmail to it, some insidious kind of blackmail that could scare the pants off a guy like Emil Perry and a dozen other big shots who couldn't afford to leave town when it pleased them. Photographs. Burned photographs. Models. A photographer named Anton Lipsek. A tough egg called Rainey. The brains named Clyde. They added.

I laughed so loud my chest hurt. I laughed and laughed and promised myself the skin of a killer. When I had the proof I could collect the skin and the D.A., the cops and anybody else could go to hell.

I had to park a block away from the Chadwick Hotel and walk back. My coat collar was up around my face like everyone else's and I wasn't worried about being seen. A patrolman swinging a night stick went by and never gave me a tumble. The lobby of the hotel was small, but crowded with a lot of faces taking a breather from the weather outside.

The Mom type at the desk gave me a smile and a nasal hello when I went to the desk. 'I'd like to see Miss Lester,' I said.

'You've been here before, sonny. Go ahead up.'

'Mind if I use your phone first?'

'Nah, go ahead. Want me to connect you with her room?'

'Yeah.'

She fussed with the plugs in the switchboard and triggered

duty of saying Wheeler was with her, and Marion Lester and Anton Lipsek were very friendly.

I needed a little talk with Marion Lester. I wanted to know why she lied and who made her lie. I'd tell her once to talk, and if she wouldn't I'd work her over until she'd be glad to talk, glad to scream her guts out and put the finger on the certain somebody I was after.

Her head wobbled from side to side. 'This tears it, sonny. The joint'll be ruined. Lawd, there goes my job!' She buried her face in her hands and moaned foolishly.

I slapped her hands away and made her look at me. 'Listen. She isn't the first. The same guy that killed her killed two others and unless he's stopped there's going to be more killing. Can you understand that?'

She nodded dumbly, terror creeping into her eyes.

'All right; who was up here to see her today?'

'Nobody. Not nobody at all.'

'Somebody was here. Somebody killed her.'

'H—how do I know who killed her?'

'I didn't say that. I said somebody was here.'

She pulled her thick lips together and licked them. 'Look, sonny, I don't take a count of who comes and goes in this place. It's easy to get in and it's easy to get out. Lotsa guys come in here.'

'And you don't notice them?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'I ain't . . . I ain't supposed to.'

'So the dump's a whore-house Nothing but a whore-house.'

She glared at me indignantly, the terror fading. 'I ain't no madam, sonny. It's just a place where the babes can stay with no questions asked, is all. I ain't no madam.'

'Do you know what's going to happen around here?' I said. 'In ten minutes this place will be crawling with cops. There's no sense running because they'll catch up with you. When they find out what's going on . . . and they will . . . you'll be up the creek. Now, you can either start thinking and maybe have a little while to get yourself a clear story to offer them or you can take what the cops have to hand out. What will it be?'

She looked me straight in the eye and told the God's honest truth. 'Sonny,' she said, 'if my life depended upon it I couldn't tell you anything different. I don't know who was in here today. The place was crawling with people ever since noontime and I read a book most of the day.'

I felt like I fell through a manhole. 'O.K., lady. Maybe there's somebody else who would know.'

'Nobody else. The girls who clean the halls only work in the morning. The guests take care of their own rooms. Everyone who lives here is a regular. No overnighters.'

'No bellboys?'

'We ain't had 'em for a year. We don't need 'em.'

I looked back at the remains of Marion Lester and wanted to vomit. Nobody knew a thing. The killer had no face. Nobody saw him. They felt him and didn't live to tell about it.

her button a few times. There was no answer. The woman shrugged and made a sour face. 'She came in and I didn't see her go out. Maybe she's in the tub. Them babes is always taking baths anyway. Go on up and pound on her door.'

I shoved the phone back and went up the stairs. They squeaked, but there was so much noise in the lobby nobody seemed to mind. I found Marion's room and knocked twice. A little light was seeping out from under the door so I figured the clerk had been right about the bath. I listened, but I didn't hear any splashing

I knocked again, louder.

Still no answer.

I tried the door and it opened easily enough.

It was easy to see why she couldn't answer the door. Marion Lester was as dead as a person could get. I closed the door quietly and stepped in the room. 'Damn,' I said, 'damn it all to hell!'

She had on a pair of red satin pyjamas and was sprawled out face down. You might have thought she was asleep if you didn't notice the angle of her neck. It had been broken with such force the snapped vertebra was pushed out against the skin. On the opposite side of the neck was a bluish imprint of the weapon. When I put the edge of my palm against the mark it almost fitted and the body was stone-cold and stiff.

The only weapon our killer liked was his strong hands.

I lifted the phone and when the clerk came on I said, 'When did Miss Lester come in?'

'Hell, she came in this morning drunk as a skunk. She could hardly navigate. Ain't she there now?'

'She's here now, all right. She won't be going out again very soon either. She's dead. You better get up here right away.'

The woman let out a muffled scream and started to run without bothering to break the connexion. I heard her feet pounding on the stairs and she wrenched the door open without any formalities. Her face went white to grey then flushed until the veins of her forehead stood out like pencils. 'Lawd! Did you do this?'

She practically fell into a chair and wiped her hand across her eyes. I said, 'She's been dead for hours. Now take it easy and think. Understand, think. I want to know who was up here today. Who called on her or even asked for her. You ought to know, you've been here all day.'

Her mouth moved, the thick lips hanging limp. 'Lawd!' she said.

I grabbed her shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled. A little life came back into her eyes. 'Answer me and stop looking foolish. Who was up here today?'

under my arm was burning a hole in my side and my finger under the glove kept tightening up expectantly.

Fourteenth street went by and two cabs were bumper-locked in the middle of the road. I followed a pick-up truck on to the pavement and off again to get around them. A police whistle blew and I muttered for the cop to go to the devil and kept on my way behind the truck.

Five minutes. My teeth were making harsh, grinding noises I could feel through my jaw. I came to my street and pulled into a parking space. Another minute went by while I oriented myself and followed the numbers in the right direction. Another two minutes went by before I found it.

Three minutes. She should almost be there by now. The name on the bell read, ANTON LIPSEK, ESQ., and some kid had written a word under it. The kid had my sympathy. I felt the same way myself. I pushed the bell and heard it tinkle some place upstairs.

Nothing happened. I pushed it again and kept my finger on it. The tinkling went on and on and on and still nothing happened. I pushed one of the other bells and the door clicked open. A voice from the rear of the first floor said, 'Who is it?'

'Me,' I said. 'I forgot my key.'

The voice said, 'Oh . . . O.K.' and the door closed. Me, the magic password. Me, the sap, the sucker, the target for a killer. Me, the stupid bastard who was going around in circles while a killer watched and laughed. That was me.

I had to light a match at every door to see where I was. I found Anton's on the top floor with another Esq. after it. There was no sound and no light, and when I tried the knob it was locked.

I was too late. I was too late all around. It was five after twelve. Velda would be inside. The door would be closed and the nuptial couch laid. Velda would know all about it the hard way.

I kicked the door so hard the lock snapped and the door flew open. I kicked it shut the same way and stood there hoping the killer would come at me out of the darkness, hoping he'd run right into the rod I held in my fist. I prayed that he'd come, listened hard hoping to hear him. All I heard was my own breathing.

My hand groped for the wall switch and found it, bathing the place with a brilliant white light. It was some place. Some joint. The furniture was nothing but wooden porch furniture and the lamps were rigged up from discarded old floodlights. The rug on the floor must have been dragged out of an ash can.

But the walls were worth a million dollars. They were hung with canvases painted by the Masters and must have been

Only me. I was lucky, I got away. First the killer tried to shoot me. It didn't work. Then he tried to lay murder in my lap and that didn't work either. Then he tried an ambush and slipped up there. I was the most important one in the whole lot.

And I couldn't make a target of myself because there wasn't time to play bait.

I looked at Marion and talked to the woman who sat there trembling from head to foot. 'Go on downstairs and put me through to the police department. I'll call them from here, but I won't be here when they come. You can tell them the same thing you told me. Go on, beat it.'

She waddled out, her entire body bearing the weight of the calamity. I held the phone to my ear and heard her call the police. When the connexion was through I asked for Homicide and got the night man. I said, 'This is Mike Hammer. I'm in the Chadwick Hotel with a dead woman. No, I didn't kill her, she's been dead for hours. The D.A. will want to hear about it so you better call him and mention my name. Tell him I'll drop by later. Yeah, yeah. No I won't be here. If the D.A. doesn't like that, it's just too damn bad. Tell him I said that, too. Goodbye.' I walked downstairs and out the front door with about a minute to spare. I was just starting up my car when the police came up with their sirens wide open, leading a black limousine that skidded to a halt as the D.A. himself jumped out and started slinging orders around.

When I drove by I beeped the horn twice, but he didn't hear it because he was too busy directing his army. Another squad car came up and I looked it over hoping to see Pat. He wasn't with them.

My watch said twenty minutes to twelve. Velda would be leaving her apartment about now. My hands were shaking when I reached for a Lucky and I had to use the dashboard lighter to get it lit, a match wouldn't hold still. If there was any fight left inside me it was going fast, draining out with each minute, and in twenty minutes there wouldn't be a thing left for me, not one damn thing.

I stopped at a saloon and pulled the phone book from its rack and fingered through the L's until I came to Lipsek, Anton. The address was right on the fringe of the Village in a section I knew pretty well. I went back to the car and crawled down Broadway.

Twenty minutes. Fifteen now, tempus fugit. Tempus fugits fast as hell. Twelve minutes. It started to snow harder. The wind picked it up and whipped the stuff into parallel, oblique lines across the multicoloured lights that lined the street. Red lights. I made like I was skidding and went through. Cars honked and I cursed back, telling them to be quiet. The gun

were three well-chewed cigar stubs squashed out in a glass coaster beside the bed.

Something was wrong. There had to be something wrong. I would have seen it if my mind wasn't twisted and dead. The whole thing was as unnatural as it was possible to be. Why the two apartments? Why the one place crawling with dirt and decorated with a fortune in pictures and the other lavish in furnishings and nothing else?

Anton was a bachelor. Until recently he didn't mess with women, so why all the bedrooms? He wasn't so popular that he was overloaded with guests. I sat on the edge of the bed and shoved my hat back on my head. It was a nice bed, soft, firm and quiet. It made me want to lean back and sleep for ever to wash the fatigue from my mind. I lay back and stared at the ceiling.

It was a white ceiling-with faint lines criss-crossing in the calcimine. My eyes followed the lines to the wall where they disappeared into the moulding. Those lines were like the tracks the killer went. They started at no place and went everywhere, disappearing just as effectively. A killer who was strong as he was vicious.

I stared at the moulding some more then picked out the pictures that hung over the bed and stared at them. They were funny little pictures painted on glass—seascapes, with the water a shimmering silver. The water had tiny palms. I got up off that bed slowly and looked at the lines criss-crossing it too, reflecting the cracks in the ceiling.

My breath was hot in my throat and my eyes had been little slits. I could feel my nails bite into my palms. The water was shiny and silver because the water was a mirror. It made a lovely, decorative picture.

Lovely, but very practical. I tried to wrench the frames loose, but they were screwed into the wall. All I could do was swear and claw at the damn things and it didn't do any good. I ran back through the living-room, opened the door of the closet and wiggled through the hole in the wall. The picture grasped at my coat and held me back and I struggled a bit with my hand.

The pictures. Those beautiful pictures. They were worth a million, a million dollars' worth. Two nudes playing in the water. I came away easily and I had the picture.

On the other side of the wall I saw the little seascape in the wall and the sky was blue. The glass had been covered for years and years in the room.

genuine, otherwise their lavish frames and engraved brass nameplates were going to waste. So Anton had money and he didn't spend it on dames. No, it went into pictures, something with a greater permanent value than money. The inscriptions were all in French and didn't mean a thing to me. Although the rest of the room was littered with empty glasses and cigarette butts, not a speck of dust nested on the frames or the pictures, and the brass plates had been recently polished.

Could this be Anton's reward for wartime collaboration? Or was it his own private enterprise?

I picked some of the trash out of the way and prowled around the apartment. There was a small studio filled with the usual claptrap of a man who brings his work home with him, and adjoining, a tiny darkroom. The sinks were filled and a small red light burned over a table. That was all there was to it. I would have left, but the red light winked at me from a reflected image in a shiny bit of metal against the wall and I ran my hand over the area.

It wasn't a wall, it was a door. It was set flush with the wall and had no knob. Only the scratch on the concealed hinge showed me where it was. Some place a hidden latch opened it and I didn't waste time looking for it. I braced my back against the sink and kicked out as hard as I could.

Part of the wall shook and cracked.

I kicked again and my foot went through the partition. The third time I had made a hole big enough to crawl into. It was an empty clothes closet that faced into another apartment.

Here was where Anton Lipsek lived in style. A wall had separated two worlds. There was junk lying around here, just the evidence of a recent and wild party. One side was a bar, stocked to the hilt with the best that money could buy. The rest of the room was the best that money could buy, too. There were couches and tables that didn't come from any department store and they matched the drapes and colour scheme perfectly. Someone with an eye for good taste had done a magnificent job of decorating. Someone like an artist-photographer named Anton Lipsek. The only thing out of place were the cheap prints that were framed in bamboo. They belonged outside with the junk. Anton was as cracked as the Liberty Bell.

Maybe.

There were other rooms, a whole lot of rooms. Apparently he had rented two apartments back to back and used the dark-room as a secret go-between. There was a hall that led into three beautiful bedrooms, each with its own shower stall and toilet. Each bedroom had ash trays filled with cigarette butts, some plain, some stained with lipstick. In one room there

What a blackmail set-up that was! One-way glass set above a bed! Oh, brother!

It took me about ten seconds to locate the camera Anton used. It was a fancy affair that would take shots without missing a single detail of expression. It had been tucked in a cabinet along with a tripod whose legs were still set at the proper level to focus the camera into the bedroom.

I threw it all on the floor and hauled out everything else that was in the cabinet. I was looking for pictures, direct evidence that would be hanging evidence. Something that would give me the big excuse when I pumped a slug into his guts.

It was simple as hell now, as simple as it could ever get. Anton Lipsek was using some of the girls to bait the big boys into the bedroom. He took pictures that set him up for life. It was the best kind of blackmail I could think of. The public could excuse anything else, but coarse infidelity, no.

Even Chester Wheeler fitted it. He was money, big money. He was in town alone and a little bit drunk. He walked into the trap; but he made one mistake that cost him his life. He recognized the girl. He recognized her as a girl that went to school with his daughter. The girl got scared and told Anton, so Anton had to see to it that Wheeler died. But the girl was still scared and eloped, grabbing the first guy who was handy. She did fine until the killer caught up with her again and didn't take any chances with her getting so scared she *would* talk.

Yeah, it all was so simple now. Even Marion. Anton was afraid of me. The papers had it down that I was a cop and my ticket had been lifted. If I had never shown my face around neither Jean nor Marion would have died, but it was too late to think of that now. Anton made Marion pick up the story and say she was the one who went out with Wheeler, but she gave it an innocent touch that couldn't be tracked down. It should have stopped there.

What happened? Did Marion get too big for her pants and want a pay-off for the story she told? Sure, why not? She was in this thing. When those pictures turned up her face would be there. All she could lose would be her character and her job, but if she had something on somebody too, she didn't stand to lose a thing. So she died. Pretty! You bet your life it was!

I started to grin and my breath came fast through my teeth. Even right back to the beginning it checked. It didn't start from the night Wheeler died, it started a few days before, long enough to give the killer time to register in the hotel and take Wheeler at a convenient moment. I was just there by accident. I was a witness who didn't matter because I was out cold, and if I had been anybody else but me it made the killing so much the better. Whisky-drunk and out like a light with no memory

The sedan tried to make a turn, yawed into a skid and slammed against the kerb. It seemed to come out of it for a moment and my stomach suddenly turned sour because I knew I'd never make it if I tried it too. This time the fates laughed again and gave me Anton. They gave me Anton with a terrible crash that threw the sedan into the wall of a building and left it upside down on the pavement like a squashed bug.

I drove my heel into the brake and did a complete circle in the street. I backed up and stopped in the middle of the road and ran to the sedan with my gun out.

I put the gun back and grunted some obscene words. Anton was dead. His neck was topped with a bloody pulp that used to be a head. All that was left were his eyes and they weren't where they were supposed to be. The door was wrenched open and I took a quick look around, hoping to find what I was after.

The only thing in the car was Anton. He was a couple of bucks worth of chemicals now. One of the dead eyes watched me go through his pockets. When I opened his wallet I found a sheaf of five-hundred-dollar bills and a registered mail receipt. There was a pencilled notation on it that said 'Sent Special Delivery' and it was dated this morning.

It was addressed to Clyde Williams.

Then it wasn't Anton after all . . . it was Clyde. That ratty little punk was the brains. Clyde was the killer and Velda was with him now. Clyde was the brains and the killer and Velda was trying to pump a guy who knew every angle.

I was an hour and a half too late.

Time had marched on. It marched on and trampled me underfoot into the mud and slime of its passing. But I could get up and follow it. I could catch up with that lost hour and a half and make it give back what it had stolen, by God!

People were screaming at me from the windows when I jumped in my car. From down the block came the low wailing of a siren and a red eye that winked on and off. The screaming came from both directions then, so I cut down a side street and got out of their path. Somebody was sure to have grabbed my licence number. Somebody was sure to relay it to the police and when they found out it was me the D.A. would eat his hat while his fat head was still in it. Suicide, he had said. He gave his own personal opinion that Chester Wheeler had been a suicide.

Smart man, our D.A., smart as a raisin on a bun.

The sky agreed with a nod and let loose more tiny flakes of snow that felt the city out and called for reinforcements. There was still a mile to go and the snow was coming down harder than ever. My fate snickered.

the lock and tumbled into the hall without bothering to close the door. I heard feet slamming on the stairs and the downstairs door smash shut. I started down the steps and fell. I ran and fell again and managed to reach the bottom without breaking any bones. All over my body were spots that would wait until later to hurt, raw spots that stuck to my clothes with my own blood.

My gun was in my hand when I ran out on the street and it was nothing more than a useless weight because Anton's car was screaming up the street towards the intersection.

How important can a guy get? What does he have to do to please the fates that hamstring him every inch of the way? I saw the red dot of his tail-light swing to the right as a cruising cab cut him off. I heard the grinding of metal and the shouts of the drivers and Anton Lipsek was up on the pavement trying to back off.

It was too far to run, too much of a chance to take. I wheeled and dashed into the alleyway that passed between the buildings and leaped for the fence at the end and pulled myself over. I climbed in my car and turned the key, felt the motor cough and catch, and I said a prayer that the snow under the wheels would hold long enough for me to get away.

The fates laughed a little and gave me a push. I pulled away from the kerb and sped down the street. Just as I turned the corner Anton drove across the pavement and back into the street while the cab driver ran after him waving his arms and yelling at the top of his lungs. I had to lean on my horn to get out of the way.

Anton must have heard the horn because he stepped on the gas and the big, fat sedan he was using leaped ahead like it had a rocket on it. That sedan was the same one that was used as a gun platform when I was shot at on Thirty-third Street. Rainey. I hope he was burning in hell where he belonged. He did the shooting while Anton drove.

I was glad to see the snow now. It had driven the cars into garages and the cabs to the kerbs. The streets were long funnels of white stretched out under the lights. I was catching up to him and he stepped down harder on the pedal. Red lights blinked on and were ignored. The sedan started to skid, came out of it safely and tore ahead.

Now he could get scared. Good and scared. He could sit there behind the wheel with the spit drooling out of the corner of his mouth and wonder why he couldn't get away. He would curse that big, fat sedan and ask it why the hell it couldn't shake an old rattletrap like mine. Anton could curse and he'd never know about the oversized engine under my hood. I was only fifty yards away and coming closer.

I threw the ten back on the table. "What's the matter, pop?"

"I have a daughter. She was good girl. Not now. That man..."

"O.K., pop. He won't bother you again. Got an extra key for that place?"

"No penthouse key." The ends of his whiskers twitched and his eyes turned a bright blue. I knew exactly how he felt.

The elevator was a small service job for the tradesmen delivering packages. I stepped in and closed the gate, then pressed the button on top marked 'up.' The cable tightened and the elevator started up, a slow tedious process that made me bite my lip to keep from yelling for it to hurry. I tried counting the bricks as they went by, then the floors. It dragged and dragged, a mechanical object with no feeling for haste. I wanted to urge it, lift it myself, do anything to hurry it but I was trapped in that tiny cubicle while my watch ticked off the precious seconds.

It had to stop some time. It slowed, halted and the gate rattled open so I could get at the door. My first instinct was to run and I had to force them to stand still while I turned the handle and peered out into the corridor.

There was a stillness about the place you would expect in a tomb, a dead quiet that magnified every sound. One side of the hall was lined with plate-glass windows from ceiling to floor overlooking a city asleep. Only the safety light over the elevator showed me the hall that stretched along this enclosed terrace to the main hall farther down. I let the door close softly and began walking. My gun was in my hand and cocked ready to blast the first person I saw into a private hell of their own. The devil didn't get any assistants because the hall was empty. There, around the bend, was a lobby that would have overshadowed the best room in the executive mansion, and all it was used for was a waiting-room for the elevator.

On the walls were huge framed pictures, magnificent etchings, all the gimmicks of wealth. The chairs were of real leather, enough of them to seat twenty people. On the end tables beside the chairs were huge vases of fresh-cut roses that sent their fragrance through the entire room. The ash trays were sterling silver and clean. Beside each ash tray was a sterling silver lighter. The only incongruous thing was the cigar butt that lay right in the middle of the thick Oriental rug.

I stood there a moment taking it all in, seeing the blank door of the elevator that faced the lobby, seeing the ornate door of the apartment and the silver bell that adorned the opposite wall. When I stepped on the rug there was no sound of my feet except a whisper that seemed to hurry me forward,

CHAPTER TWELVE

I CHECKED the address on the mail receipt against the one on the apartment. They both read the same. The building was a yellow-brick affair that towered out of sight into the snow, giving only glimpses of the floors above.

A heavy blue canvas canopy sheltered the walk that led into the lobby, guarded by a doorman in an admiral's uniform. I sat in the car and watched him pace up and down, flapping his arms to keep him warm. He took the admiral's hat off and pressed his hands against his cauliflowered ears to warm them and I decided not to go in the front way after all. Guys like him were too eager to earn a ready buck being tough.

When I crossed the street I walked to the next building until the snow shielded me, then cut back to the walk that took me around the rear. A flight of steps led down to a door that was half open and I knocked on it. A voice with a Swedish accent called back and an old duck with lip whiskers that reached to his ears opened the door and said, 'Ya?'

I grinned. The guy waited. I reached in my pocket and pulled out a ten-spot. He looked at it without saying anything. I had to nudge him aside to get in and saw that the place was part of the boiler room in the basement. There was a table under the solitary bulb in the place and a box drawn up to it. I walked over to the table and turned around.

The old boy shut the door and picked up a poker about four feet long.

I said, 'Come here, pop.' I laid the ten on the table.

He hefted the poker and came over. He wasn't looking at the ten-spot. 'Clyde Williams. What's his apartment number?'

Whatever I said made his fingers tighten around the poker. He didn't answer. There wasn't time to be persuasive. I yanked out the Luger and set it next to the ten. 'Which one, pop?'

His fingers got tighter and he was getting ready to take me. First he wanted to ask a question. 'Why you want him?'

'I'm going to break him in little pieces, pop. Anybody else that stops me might get it too.'

'Poot back your gun,' he said. I shoved it in the holster. 'Now poot back your money.' I stuck the ten in my pocket. He dropped the poker to the floor. 'He is the penthouse in. There is elevator in the back. You use that, ya? Go break him, ya?'

spoke every word as though it was being squeezed out of him.

Velda came out of the couch and under my arm. I could feel her trembling as she sobbed against my chest. 'She knows me, Dinky. So do you know me. You know what's going to happen now?'

The red hole that had been his mouth clamped shut. I lifted Velda's face and asked, 'Did he hurt you, kid?'

She couldn't speak. She shook her head and sobbed until it passed. When it was over she mumbled, 'Oh, Mike . . . it was awful.'

'And you didn't learn a thing, did you?'

'No.' She shuddered and fumbled with the buttons of her suit coat.

I saw her handbag on the table and pointed to it. 'Did you carry that thing with you, honey?'

She knew I meant the gun and nodded.

'Get it,' I said.

Velda inched away from me, loath to leave the protection of my arm. She snatched the bag and ripped it open. When she had the gun in her hand I laughed at the expression on Clyde's face. 'I'm going to let her kill you, Dinky. I'm going to let Velda put a slug in you for what you tried and for what you've done to other girls.'

He stuttered something I didn't get and his lower lip hung away from his teeth. 'I know all about it, Dinky. I know why you did it and how you did it. I know everything about your pretty little blackmail set-up. You and Anton using the girls to bring in the boys who counted. When the girls had them in bed Anton took the pictures and from then on you carried the ball. You know something, Dinky . . . you got a brain. You got a bigger brain than I've ever given you credit for.'

'It just goes to show you how you can underrate people. Here I've been figuring you for a stooge and you're the brain. It was clever as hell the way you killed Wheeler, all because he recognized one of the kids. Maybe he was going to have his little affair kept quiet, but you showed up with the pictures and wanted the pay-off. He wired for five grand and handed it over, didn't he? Then he got sore and got in touch with Jean Trotter again and told her who he was. So Jean ups and tells you, which put the end to Wheeler.'

Clyde looked at me speechlessly, his hands limp at his sides.

'That really started things. You had Wheeler planned for a kill and Wheeler grabbed my gun and tried to hand it to you. Only two things stump me. What was it you had planned for Wheeler before he reached for my rod and gave you the bright idea of suicide? And why kill Rainey? Was it because

until I stood in front of the door wondering whether to shoot the lock off or ring the bell.

Neither was necessary. Right on the floor close to the sill was a small gold-plated key and I said thanks to the fate that was standing behind me and picked it up. My mouth was dry as a bone, so dry that my lips couldn't pull over my teeth when I grinned.

Velda had played it smart. I never thought she'd be so smart. She had opened the door and left the key there in case I came.

I'm here, Velda. I came too late, but I'm here now and maybe somehow I can make it all up to you. It didn't have to be this way at all, but I'll never tell you that. I'll let you go on thinking that you did what was right; what you had to do. You'll always think you sacrificed something I wanted more than anything else in the world, and I won't get mad. I won't get mad when I want to slap the hell out of the first person that mentions it to me, even if it's you. I'll make myself smile and try to forget about it. But there's only one way I can forget about it and that's to feel Clyde's throat in my hand, or to have him on the end of a gun that keeps going off and off until the hammer clicks on an empty chamber. That way I'll be able to smile and forget.

I turned the key in the lock and walked in. The door clicked shut behind me.

The music stole into the foyer. It was soft music, deep music with a haunting rhythm. The lights were low, deliberately so to create the proper effect. I didn't see what the room was like; I didn't make any attempt to be quiet. I followed the music through the rooms unaware of the splendour of the surroundings, until I saw the huge phonograph that was the source of the music and I saw Clyde bending over Velda on the couch. He was a dark shadow in a satin robe. They both were shadows there in the corner, shadows that made hoarse noises, one demanding and the other protesting. I saw the white of Velda's leg, the white of her hand she had thrown over her face, and heard her whimper. Clyde threw out his arm to toss off the robe and I said, 'Stand up, you stinking bastard!'

Clyde's face was a mask of rage that turned to fear in the single instant he saw me.

I wasn't too late after all. I was about one minute early.

Velda screamed a harried 'Mike!' and squirmed upright on the couch. Clyde moved in slow motion, the hate . . . the unbounding hate oozing out of him. The skin of his face was drawn tight as a bowstring as he looked at her.

'Mike, you said. You know him then! It was a frame!' He

butt and slashed it across my jaw. I also got a barrel caught me on the temple with a jolt that dropped me to my knees. The voice with the gun took his turn and the back of my head felt like it flew to pieces.

I don't know how long I lay there. Time didn't mean a thing any more. First I was too late, then I was early, now I was too late again. I heard Clyde through the fog ordering Velda into another room. I heard him say to the guy, 'Drag him in with her. It's soundproof in there, nobody'll hear us. I'll fix him good for this when I get through with her. I want him to watch it. Put him in a chair and make him watch it.'

Then there were hands under my arms and my feet dragged across the floor. A door slammed and I felt the arms of a chair digging in the small of my back. Velda said, 'No . . . oh, God! . . . NO!'

Clyde said, 'Take it off! All of it!' I got my eyes open. Clyde was standing there flexing his hands, his face a picture of lust unsatisfied. The other guy stood to one side of me watching Velda back away until she was against the wall. He still had the gun in his hand.

They all saw me move at the same time. My heart hammered me to my feet and I wanted to kill them both. Clyde rasped, 'Shoot him if he tries anything.' He said it knowing I was going to try it anyway, and the guy brought the gun up.

There was only a single second to see it happen. Clyde and the guy had their eyes off Velda just long enough. Her hand went inside her suit jacket and came out with a little hammerless automatic that barked a deadly bark and the guy with the gun grabbed his stomach and tried to swear.

The pain in my head wouldn't let me stand. I tried to reach her and fell, seeing Clyde grab her arm and wrestle for the rod even as I was dragging myself towards the snub-nosed revolver that was still clutched in the other guy's hand.

Velda screamed, 'Mike . . . get him! Mike!' She was bent double trying to hold on to the gun. Clyde gave a wrench and she tumbled to the floor, her jacket ripping wide open. Velda screamed again and the gun clattered across the floor. Clyde wouldn't have had time to get it before I reached the other one and he knew it. He swore obscenely and ran for the door and slammed it shut after him. A bolt clicked in the lock and furniture was rammed against it to block the way. Then another door jarred shut and Clyde was gone.

Velda had my head in her lap rocking me gently. 'Mike, you fool, are you all right? Mike, speak to me.'

'I'm O.K., kid. I'll be fine in a minute.' She touched the cuts on my face, healing them with a kiss. Tears streamed down her cheeks. I forced a grin and she held me tighter. 'Shrewdie,

he wasn't the faithful dog you thought he was? I have an idea on that . . . Rainey missed his first try at me on the street and you gave him the whip, hard enough so that Rainey got sore and made off with the dough he got for the photos from Emi Perry. You went out there to the arena to kill him and spotted me. You saw a nice way to drop it in my lap and promised the two witnesses a six-gun pay-off unless they saw it your way.

'Brother, did you get the breaks. Everything went your way. I bet you even have a dandy alibi rigged up for that night. Velda told me you were out until midnight . . . supposedly at a conference. It was enough time, wasn't it?'

Clyde was staring at the gun in my hand. I held it at hip level, but he was looking right down the barrel. Velda's was aimed right at his stomach.

'What did you do with Jean, Clyde? She was supposed to have eloped. Did you stash her away in a rooming-house somewhere planning to get rid of her? Did she read the papers and find out about Rainey and break loose until you ran her down and tossed her over the bridge? Did Marion Lester put the heat on you for cash when she had you over the barrel until she had to be killed too?'

'Mike . . .' he said.

'Shut up. I'm talking. I want to know a few things, Clyde. I want to know where those pictures are. Anton can't tell me because Anton's dead. You ought to see his head. His eyes were where his mouth was supposed to be. He didn't have them so that puts it on you.'

Clyde threw his arms back and screamed. Every muscle of his face contorted into a tight knot and the robe fell off his shoulders to the floor. 'You aren't hanging murder on me, you shamus! I'm not going to hang for any murder, not me!'

Velda grabbed my arm and I shrugged her off. 'You called it, Clyde. You won't hang for any murder, and you know why? Because you're going to die right here in this room. You're going to die and when the cops come I'll tell them what happened. I'll tell them that you had this gun in your hand and I took it away from you and used it myself. Or I can let Velda do it and put this gun in your hand later. It came from overseas . . . nobody will ever trace it to me. How do you like those apples, Clyde?'

The voice behind me said, 'He don't like 'em, mister. Drop that gun or I'll give it to you and the broad both.'

No, it couldn't happen to me again. Not again. Please, God, not this time. The hard, round snout of a gun pressed against my spine. I dropped the Luger. Velda's hit the floor next to it. Clyde let out a scream of pure joy and staggered across the room to fall on it. He didn't talk. He lifted that rod by the

There was utter silence.

I threw the revolver on a chair and picked the Luger off the floor and stuffed it under my arm. I waved my thumb to the phone. 'Call Pat. Try until you get him and if you can't, call the D.A.'s office. That'll get action quick enough. Make them put out a call for Clyde and we might be able to stop him in time.' I half-ran, half-stumbled to the door and held it open. Velda shouted something after me that I didn't hear and I scrambled out to the lobby. The elevator pointer was at the bottom floor, the basement. But the service car was still in place. It took its own, agonizing time about going down and I stopped it at the main hall and ran out the front. The admiral gave me a queer look, tried to grab me and got a fist in the mouth. He lost me in the snow before he could get up, but I could hear him yelling as I got in my car. I was two blocks away from the apartment building when the first squad car shot by. I was five blocks farther on when I remembered that Connie had gone up to the office that night.

I got that funny feeling back in my stomach again and jammed my foot down on the throttle and weaved across town so I could intersect Thirty-third Street without wasting a minute.

When I came to the cemetery of buildings I slowed down and parked. A light was on behind the entrance doors and an old fellow sat under it reading a paper. He was just checking his turnip watch when I pulled the door open. He shook his head and waved for me to go away.

I kicked the door so hard it shook violently. The old guy threw his paper down and turned the lock. 'It's too late. You can't go in. We closed up half-hour ago. Not even late visitors. Go on, scram.'

He didn't get a chance to close it on me. I rammed it with the heel of my hand and stepped inside. 'Anybody been here in the last few minutes?'

His head jerked nervously. 'Ain't been nobody here for over an hour. Look, you can't come in, so why don't you . . .'

Clyde hadn't shown up. Hell, he had to come here! He should be here! 'Is there another way in this place?'

'Yes, the back way. That's locked up tight. Nobody can get in that way unless I unbolt it. Look, mister . . .'

'Oh, keep quiet. Call the cops if you want to.'

'I don't understand . . . what you after?'

I let him have the nastiest look I could work up. 'A killer. A guy with a gun.'

He swallowed hard. 'Nobody's been in . . . you're kidding, ain't you?'

'Yeah, I'm kidding, so hard it hurts. You know who I am,

a regular shrewdie, aren't you?' I fingered the straps of the miniature shoulder holster she was wearing under the ruins of her jacket. 'You'll do as a partner. Who'd ever think a girl would be wearing a shoulder rig?'

She grinned back and helped me to my feet. I swayed and held on to the chair for support. Velda tried the door, rattling the knob with all her strength. 'Mike . . . it's locked! We're locked in.'

'Damn it!'

The guy on the floor coughed once and twitched. Blood spilled out of his mouth and he gave one final, convulsive jerk. I said, 'You can put a notch on your gun, Velda.'

I thought she was going to get sick, but that animal look screwed her face into a snarl. 'I wish I had killed them both. Mike, what are we going to do? We can't get out.'

'We have to, Velda. Clyde . . .'

'Did he . . . is he the one?'

My head hurt. My brain was a soggy mass that revolted against thought. 'He's the one. Try that door again.' I finally picked the gun up off the floor and stood with it in my hand. It was almost too heavy to hold.

'Mike . . . that night that Rainey was killed . . . Clyde was at a conference. I heard them talking about it in the Bowery Inn. He was there.'

My stomach heaved. The blood was pounding in my ears. I put the gun to the lock and pulled the trigger. The crack of it sent it spinning out of my hand. The lock still didn't give. Velda repeated, 'Mike . . .'

'I heard you, goddamn it! I don't care what you saw or what anybody said. It was Clyde, can't you see that? It was Clyde and Anton. They had the pictures and . . .'

I stopped and stared at the door. 'The pictures . . . Clyde's gone after those pictures. If he gets them he'll have the protection he needs and he'll get out of this sure as grass grows in the springtime!'

I found the gun and levelled it at the lock, pulling the trigger until the room reeked with the fumes of burned powder. Damn his soul! Those pictures . . . they weren't in Anton's apartment and they weren't here . . . the outside door had slammed shut too fast to give him time to pick anything up on the way. That left only one other place, the agency office.

Thinking about it gave me the strength I needed to bash it with my shoulder until it budged. Velda pushed with me and the furniture on the other side moved. We leaned against the dead weight, harder, working until the cords stood out in our necks. Something toppled from the pile and the door moved back far enough to let us out.

whole thing had been done with one swift, clean stroke. I opened her fingers gently and lifted out the piece of shipping tag she had clutched so tightly. The part that was left said, 'To attach magnifier to screen . . .' the rest had been torn off. In the dust of the floor was the outline of where a crate had stood. Another fine line in the dust showed where the same crate had been tipped on end and dragged out in the hall. There were no marks after that and no crate either.

I left the door open and went back to the foyer, the little watchman blubbering behind me. After I tried a half-dozen combinations in the switchboard I got an outside wire. I said, 'Give me the police.' The watchman sat down and trembled while I told the desk man at the precinct station where to look for a body. When I hung up I steered the little guy back to the elevator and made him run me down to the basement.

It was just what I had expected. The door that was supposed to have been bolted so tightly to keep people out was swinging wide where a killer had gotten out.

The watchman didn't want to be left alone, and begged me not to go. I shoved him away and walked up the stairs and around the building.

I knew where the killer was hiding now.

Mac? My name is Mike Hammer. The cops want me. The killer wants me. Everybody wants my skin and I'm still walking around loose. Now answer my question—who was in here tonight.'

This time he gulped audibly. 'Some . . . a guy from the first . . . floor. He came back and worked. A few people from the insurance came in. Some others were with Roy Carmichael when he came in. They got some likker out of the office and left. I saw some others standing around the register later. Maybe if you looked there . . .'

'Sure, he wrote his name down. Take me upstairs, pop. I want to get in the Anton Lipsek Agency.'

'Oh, say now! Young girl went in there while back. Nice kid. Sure I let her in there. Don't remember seeing her come back. Must've been making my rounds.'

'Take me upstairs.'

'You better use the self-service elevator . . .'

I shoved him in one of the main cars and he dropped his time clock. He glared at me once and shut the door. We got out and walked down the hall to the office and my gun was in my hand. This time there wouldn't be anybody coming up behind me.

The light was on and the doors were open, wide open. I went in running with my gun waist-high and covered the room. The watchman was wheezing in the doorway, bug-eyed with fright. I combed the rooms until the place was lit up like it was a working day. There were dressing-rooms and minor offices, closets for supplies and closets for clothes. There were three neat darkrooms and one not so neat. I found the room I was looking for branching off a layout studio.

I found it and I opened the door and stood there with my mouth open to let me breathe up all the insane hatred that was stored up in my chest.

Connie was lying in the middle of the room with her eyes wide open. Her back had been bent to form a 'V' and she was dead.

The room was ceiling high with storage cabinets, covered with dust that revealed its infrequent use. The drawer of one of those cabinets gaped wide open and a whole section of folders had been removed.

I was too late again.

The watchman had to hold on to me to keep from fainting. He worked his mouth, trying to keep his eyes from the body. He made slobbering noises and shouted his fear and he held on tighter. He was still holding my arm when I kneeled down to look at Connie.

No marks, just that look of incredible pain on her face. The

The faint that spoke to my brain, her eyes were eloquent. She stood there in a long sleeved gown, her hands clutching her throat as my madness reached her. 'Mike! . . . That was all she could say. Her breasts rose under the gown as her breath caught.

'Where is he, June?' I had the paper in my hand when my thumb found the hammer and dropped it back.

Her lips, her beautiful lips quivered and she took a step away from me. One step then another until she was standing in the living-room. 'You're hiding him, June. He came here. It was the only place the crazy bastard could come. Where is he?'

Ever so slowly she closed her eyes, shaking her head. 'No, please, please, Mike. What have they done to you? Mike.'

'I found Condo, June. She was in the store when she was dead, I found the files gone. Clyde might have had just enough time to get in and tear those files out after he killed Condo. I found something else, the same thing she found. It was just a shipping ticket for a television set. That was the set you were supposed to deliver to Jean Trotter, but you knew the police were going to need that so you had it stored in the store room. If you could get rid of it, you were the only one who knew where there . . . until tonight. Did Clyde find it and take it away so you wouldn't get tied into this?'

Her eyes opened wide, eyes that said it wasn't for a moment part of it. I didn't believe them. 'Where is he, June? I saw you the gun up until it pointed at a spot halfway between your laughing, youthful breasts under the gown.'

'Nobody is here, Mike. You saw that. Please . . .'

'Seven people are dead, June. Seven people. In this crazy scheme of things you have a part. I'd want to see the thought, hand-colored to color upon someone you're proud of a look at it. Don't play games with me, June. I know the files were killed and how they were killed. It was a plan to kill who killed them that had me going to college. I'd have been in mail cycle would have remained intact. For one of them, you would have died if I hadn't been in the store with the gun that night. Who knew that I'd be my father's son when I was up?'

She watched me, her hands still as I spoke. She took a step forward and said, 'No, Mike, no!' and her hands were raised to keep her balanced. It was then that I saw her hand to steady herself, holding it to her forehead. Slowly, gracefully even now, she sat down on the floor with her lower lip between her teeth.

I nodded yes, June, yes. The gun in my hand. The hatred I had inside me, bubbled over with me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE snow that had tried so hard to block me wasn't something to be fought any longer. I leaned back against the cushions of the car in complete relaxation and had the first enjoyable cigarette I'd had in a long time. I sucked the smoke down deep into my lungs and let it go reluctantly. Even the smoke looked pretty as it drifted out the window into the night.

Everything was so white, covering up so much filth. Nature doing its best to hide its own. I drove slowly, carefully, staying in the tracks of the cars ahead. When I turned on the radio I heard my name mentioned on the police broadcast band and turned the dial until I had some late music.

When I reached my destination I backed in between two cars and even went to the trouble of locking the door like any good citizen would who expects to go home and to bed for the rest of the night. There were a few lights on in the apartment building, but whether they came from the one I wanted or not, I couldn't tell.

I took one last drag on the butt and flipped it into the gutter. It lay there a moment fizzling before it went out. I walked in the lobby and held my finger on the buzzer until the door clicked, then I walked in.

Why hurry? Time had lost its value. My feet took each step carefully, one after the other, bringing me to the top. I walked straight down the hall to the door that stood open and said, 'Hello, Juno.'

I didn't wait for her answer. I brushed right past her and walked inside. I walked through the room and pulled chairs from their corners. I walked into the bedroom and opened the closet doors. I walked into the bathroom and ripped the shower curtain down. I walked into the kitchen and poked around the pantry.

My hands were ready to grab and my feet were ready to kick and my gun was ready to shoot. But nobody was there. The fires began in my feet and licked up my body until they were eating into my brain. Every pain that had been ignored up to this moment gave birth to greater pains that were like teeth ripping my flesh apart. I held the edge of the door and spun around to face her with all that pain and hatred laid bare on my face.

My voice was a deadly hiss. 'Where is he Juno?'

spilled out. 'I thought it was Anton at first. Then I found a mail receipt to Clyde. Anton had sent him some pictures. The Bowery Inn was a great place to draw the girls. It was designed specifically for that. It got the girls and with them the suckers.'

'Who let the girls there in the first place, Juno? Who made it a fad to hang out down there where Clyde could win at his gambling tables and insure his business with photos that gave him the best coverage in the world. Did you do that, Juno? Did Clyde have a crush on you at one time and figure a good way of being able to stay in business? Was it Clyde who saw the possibilities of getting blackmail evidence on the big shots? Or was it you? It wasn't Anton, for sure. That goon had rocks in his head. But he co-operated, though, didn't he? He co-operated because he saw a way to purchase all those expensive paintings he had in his place.'

Her eyes were dull things, all the life gone from them. She sat with her head down and sobbed, one hand covering her face.

I spat the words out. 'That's the way it was, all right. It worked fine for a while. Clyde had his protection and he was using it for all he was worth. But you, Juno . . . you wanted to go on with it. It wasn't so hard to do because money is easy to like. You were the brains of the outfit . . . the thinking brains. Clyde was the strong-arm boy and he had his little army to help him out.'

I stopped and let it sink in. I waited a full minute.

'Juno! . . .'

She raised her head slowly. Her eyes were red, the mascara streaking her cheeks. 'Mike . . . can't you . . .'

'Who killed them all, Juno? Where is he?'

Her hands dropped to her lap, folded across her stomach in despair. I raised the gun. 'Juno!' Only her eyes looked at me. 'I'm going to shoot you, Juno, then I'm going to go out and get him all by myself. I'm going to shoot you where it will hurt like hell and you won't die quickly . . . if you don't tell me. All you have to do is tell me where I can find him and I'll give him the chance to use his hands on me like he tried to do before and like he did to some of the others. Where is he, Juno?'

She didn't speak.

I was going to kill her, so help me God! If I didn't she could fake her way out because I was the only one who knew what had happened. There wasn't a single shred of evidence against her that could be used in court and I knew it. But I could kill her. She had a part in this! The whole thing was her doing and she was as guilty as the killer!

The gun in my hand wavered and I clamped down on the

over so big with Clyde? God, what an ass I was! I should have caught it the day you hauled me into that village joint for dinner. There was a Lesbian who followed you into the ladies' room. I bet she could have kicked herself when she found out you were no better than she was. It was a part that fitted you to perfection. You played it so well that only the ones who didn't dare talk knew about it. Well, Juno, I know about it. Me. Mike Hammer, I know all about it and I'll talk. I'll tell them you killed Chester Wheeler because he got mad enough to try to expose the girl who framed him, and you killed Rainey because he tried to clip you out of some dirty dough, and Jean Trotter died for knowing the truth, and Marion Lester for the same reason. You couldn't have anybody knowing a truth that could be held over your head. Then Connie died because she discovered the truth when she found that television set in the storeroom and knew you never delivered it because Jean Trotter was no more married than you were. Yeah, I'm going to talk my fool head off, you slimy bastard, but first I'm going to do something else.'

I dropped the Luger to the floor.

It was too impossible for her to comprehend and she missed her chance. I had the Luger back in my hand before she could snatch the gun out of the drawer. I forgot all my reservations about shooting a woman then. I laughed through the blood on my lips and brought the Luger up as Juno swung around with eyes blazing a hatred I'll never see again. The rod was jumping in my hand, spitting nasty little slugs that flattened the killer against the wall with periods that turned into commas as the blood welled out of the holes. Juno lived until the last shot had ripped through flesh and intestines and kicked the plaster from the wall, then died with those rich, red lips split in a snarl of pain and fearful knowledge.

She lived just long enough to hear me tell her that she was the only one it could have been, the only one who had the time. The only one who had the ability to make her identity a bewildering impossibility. She was the only one who could have taken that first shot at me on Broadway because she tailed me from the minute I left the house. She was the one all the way around because the reasons fit her perfectly as well as Clyde and Clyde didn't kill anybody. And tomorrow that was tomorrow would prove it when certain people had their minds jarred by a picture of what she really looked like, with her short hair combed back and parted on the side.

Juno died hearing all that and I laughed again as I dragged myself over to the lifeless lump, past all the foam rubber gadgets that had come off with the gown, the inevitable falsies she kept covered so well along with nice solid muscles by

I leaped in to meet her and got my hands on her clothes to jam her in close.

But she twisted away and there was a loud whispering tear of cloth and the gown came away in my hands. Juno went staggering across the room stark naked except for the high-heel shoes and sheer stockings. She rammed an end table, her hands reaching for the drawer, and she got it open far enough for me to see the gun she was trying to get at.

I had mine out first and I said harshly, 'Stand still, Juno!'

She froze there, not a muscle in that beautiful body moving. I looked at all that white bare skin, seeing it in contrast with the shoes and the stockings. Her hands were still on the drawer and inches away from the gun. She didn't have to be told that it couldn't be done.

I let her stand in that position, that ridiculous, obscene position while I lifted the phone off its hook. I had to be sure of just one thing. I went through Information and gave her an address, and I heard Clyde's phone ring. It took a little persuasion to get the cop off the line and Velda on it. I asked her one question and she answered it. She said Clyde was down in the basement out cold. The janitor had gotten him with a poker for some reason or other when he tried to get out. Clyde had never been near the office! She was still asking questions when I hung up.

It was all over now. I had found out *why*, I had found out *how*, now I knew *who*. The dead could go back to being dead for ever.

I said, 'Turn around, Juno.'

No dancer of ballet could have been more poised. Juno balanced delicately on tiptoe and stared at me, the devils of the pit alive in her eyes. The evil of murder was a force so powerful that I could feel it across the room. Juno, queen of the goddesses, standing naked before me her skin glistening in the light.

Tomorrow I'd get my licence back from the D.A. with a note of apology attached. Tomorrow Ed Cooper would have his scoop. Tomorrow would be tomorrow and tonight was tonight. I looked across Olympus and stared at Juno.

'I should have known, Juno. It occurred to me every time you rolled those big beautiful eyes at me. I knew it every time you suggested one of your little love games, then got scared because you knew you didn't dare go through with it. Damn it, I knew it all along and it was too incredible to believe. Me a guy what likes women, a guy who knows every one of their stunts . . . and I fall for this. Yeah, you and Clyde had a business arrangement all right. You had a lot more than that too. Who kept who, Juno? Are you the reason why Velda went

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dresses that went to her neck and down to her wrists. It was funny. Very funny. Funnier than I ever thought it could be. Maybe you'd laugh, too. I spit on the clay that was Juno, queen of the gods and goddesses, and I knew why I'd always had a resentment that was actually a revulsion when I looked at her.

Juno was a queen, all right, a real, live queen. You know the kind.

Juno was a man!

THE END

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